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THE PHILOSOPHER:

IN

THREE CONVERSATIONS.

PART III.

DEDICATED TO THE

BISHOP OF GLOCESTER.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

TO THE

Right Reverend

FATHER IN GOD,

WILLIAM,

Lord Biſhop of GLOCESTER.

MY LORD,

I HAVE obligations to your lordſhip for ſome of the thoughts in the following converſation. Many years have paſt ſince I read, *The Alliance between church and ſtate.* What I now remember of it is, that it gave me the firſt idea I had ever entertained of the church of England, as it was in fact; not perhaps as it ought to be.—It occurred to me at the time, and it has often ſince in reading your lordſhip's writings, as ſomething ſtrange, that a

word never eſcapes you to the diſparagement of the doctrines, diſcipline, or articles of the eſtabliſhment. They were appointed by men uninſpired and fallible. No man can be more ſenſible of this than your lordſhip; for you blend their canons and conſtitutions with the laws of the land. In ſome reſpects however, you treat them as you would the ſcriptures themſelves; you are ſo far from queſtioning their general truth and utility, that you never animadvert on a word in them, and write and act in relation to them, as if they were ſent from heaven. How happy! if all clergymen had your lordſhip's faith; or your lordſhip's piety!—their conſciences would then favor their intereſt; and they might be at peace, while they were advancing their dignities and fortunes!—You know, my lord, there are many who are not thus happy; whoſe learning and characters are a credit to the church. It would be an uncommon degree of goodneſs in you to favor their claims of indulgence; the more meritorious becauſe perfectly diſintereſted. One might

ſuſpect

ſuſpect in *Lowth* a view to the eaſe and quiet of his own mind, if his prudence forſook him, and he countenanced the mal-contents: *Law* might be conſidered as viſionary: and *Barrington* as having the leaven of preſbyterianiſm:—but *You*, my lord, would ſtand clear of ſuch imputations, and be thought to proceed upon truly political and conſtitutional principles.

My reaſons for addreſſing you on the ſubject of religion, are much the ſame with thoſe which led me to addreſs Lord *Mansfield* on that of politics. You are in the church, ſomething like what he is in the civil adminiſtration; the champion of the cauſe; and the man upon whom its adherents place their greateſt dependance. Like him you are admired in the world; and like him, I am ſorry to ſay, you are deteſted. I am not one of thoſe who run into extremes about you. I leave your excellencies and your faults, in a great meaſure, to thoſe who know more of them than I do. Indeed I have pitied you, while ſuffering under

the vigorous and mercileſs arm of a *Churchill*; and I have ſmiled, while the ſkilful hand of an *Hurd* has been applying the ſweeteſt balm of conſolation, and his flattering voice has been ſoothing you into peace.——But my buſineſs is with the influence which you have in the church; or that part of civil government which concerns religion. You have been long an able advocate of a cauſe which is daily declining. Your exiſtence as an author depends on the preſervation of the chriſtian religion; for *the divine legation of Moſes* will not be even a matter of curioſity, when chriſtianity has intirely loſt its credit. Does it not concern you then, my lord, to attend to the cauſes of that diſregard under which it labors, and which threaten to drive it out of the land?—It is the opinion of ſome of its beſt and moſt intelligent advocates, that they lie principally in injudicious and ill-conducted eſtabliſhments; which, like fooliſh friends, ruin thoſe they were meant to ſerve.—We are not now to enquire, whether there be an alliance between

between the church and the ſtate; but whether our civil conſtitution and the public happineſs, do not require ſome improvements in our religious eſtabliſhment, and our public worſhip; and whether we may not aſcribe, in a great degree, to the neglect of thoſe improvements, the diſregard and contempt which are thrown on religion?

You, my lord, are one of the moſt diſtinguiſhed of our *fathers in God*; who are ſuppoſed to have the direction of our ſpiritual concerns; and to be the guardians and interpreters of our holy religion. To whom are we to look up for aſſiſtance, when that religion is in danger, but to you?—You would not countenance the evil report, 'That biſhops are the creatures of the crown, and always go with the adminiſtration of the day?' You would not have your order claſſed with place-men and penſioners, who are controled by the nod of a prime miniſter, or animated by his ſmile? You will not ſurely ſo far forget the antient dignity, and even pride of

your

your bench; you will not add truth to brilliancy in every thing which a *Chesterfield* has said against it; and suffer it to lose all the reverence and respect with which it has been used to be treated?

I apply to you, my lord, for countenance and assistance in the cause I endeavour to serve; because it is in your power to afford them. Whatever men who have neither abilities or learning, may be obliged to engage for, to secure their preferments; your lordship need only to depend on yourself; you might employ your abilities with freedom for the good of your country; and you need not fear to exercise that independance which is consistent with your duty to government, and secures the love of a generous people. Why should the departments allotted to the ministers of Christ be, in a peculiar manner, destitute of freedom? Why should those ministers be remarkable for servility?—It is true, they are the servants of the crown;—they are also the servants of the public; and would be protected by the public, while

while they conſulted its intereſt, from any attempts to oppreſs them. Why, eſpecially as members of the legiſlature, ſhould they not be at leaſt on a footing with other men; examine our conſtitution with the ſame freedom, and propoſe, without fear, all thoſe changes and improvements which appear to them beneficial? At the ſame time, that I would wiſh the church dependant on the ſtate, and its miniſters under the controul of the civil government; I would ſtill have their rights left to them in common with other men, and wiſh to ſee them active for the public good. I am glad that almoſt all the juggling tricks of the profeſſion have loſt their effect; but I want to ſee all the talents of the clergy employed for the advantage of a rational, and truly catholic religion. If you, my lord, would lead the way, or aſſiſt in a deſign of this nature, it would redound more to your credit, becauſe it would be of more advantage to your country, than if you proved the divine legation of Moſes to the ſatisfaction even of *Voltaire*,

laire, and by an argument which no man ever thought of before you.

And, my lord, as you muſt be ſuppoſed to believe in the truth of the chriſtian religion, and to conſider yourſelf as the ſervant of its benevolent Author; I have thought it muſt ſometimes occur to you, what figure you are likely to make before him at the general judgment of the world. If it ſhould then appear that you entered your Maſter's ſervice with views only of private advantage, and that you made religion a cloke to your ambition; you will be judged diſhoneſt and hypocritical; and may be condemned in the very words which you have often uſed in the condemnation of knaves and hypocrites. You will plead in vain, your dignity, your abilities, your learning; if you have neglected the virtuous and public ſpirited uſe of them, you will be thought an *unprofitable ſervant*.—'You may have 'written volumes in my cauſe, the 'judge may ſay; and even done it con'ſiderable ſervice; I have already 'told you that you might prophecy

'in my name, and in my name caſt out
'devils; and in my name do many
'wonderful works, and yet be con-
'demned to depart from me, becauſe
'you had done iniquity.'

If it ſhould appear that you really believed, as you profeſſed to believe, in the truth and divinity of your religion, that you entered on your profeſſion with honeſt and religious views; that you roſe in dignity only from your merit, and that you employed your abilities in every way you could, for the credit of religion and the public advantage; you will be diſtinguiſhed before angels and men; and the judge will appoint you one of thoſe *rulers over many things*, who will enjoy the principal honours of the heavenly kingdom.

I am,
My LORD,
your Lordſhip's
moſt obedient
humble ſervant,

The AUTHOR.

DEDICATION.

in my name, and in my name cast out devils; and in my name do many wonderful works, and yet be condemned to depart from me, because you had done iniquity.

If it should appear that you really believed, as you professed to believe, in the truth and divinity of your religion, that you entered on your profession with honest and religious views; that you rose in dignity only from your merit, and that you employed your abilities in every way you could, for the credit of religion and the public advantage; you will be distinguished before angels and men; and the judge will appoint you one of those *many* [illegible], who will enjoy the principal honours of the heavenly kingdom.

I am,

My Lord,

your Lordship's

most obedient

humble servant,

The AUTHOR.

THE PHILOSOPHER.

THIRD CONVERSATION.

PHILOSOPHER, COURTIER, WHIG, CLERGYMAN *of the eſtabliſhed Church*, PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

CLERGYMAN.

AS I knew the ſubject of this converſation to be Religion, I have brought a friend to my aſſiſtance in ſeeing that it has fair play. He is a diſſenting miniſter; a man of learning and candor.

PHILOSOPHER.

I do not doubt it, ſir; and I am glad he is come: for, without him we could not very well have managed our converſation; as he is of an order which has ſome influence on the ſtate of religion in this country.—But why ſhould you give a hint, as if religion

had not the beſt chance of being fairly treated? I hold it as ſacred as you do. Indeed my buſineſs, at preſent, is not with the truth of religion; but with the uſe which is made of it, as it is incorporated with our laws, and is made to effect many of the important purpoſes of civil government.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

I beg your pardon, Sir,—ſhould you not firſt conſider the propriety of making it a part of our ſyſtem of laws? It is the opinion of a great many of the diſſenters, that it ought not to have been ſo made; and they aſcribe to that miſtake, in a great meaſure, the preſent low credit of the chriſtian religion.

PHILOSOPHER.

I have ſome little apprehenſion on entering the province of divines: of all men, they have been hitherto the moſt irraſcible, and the moſt reluctant to forgive any animadverſions on their principles and conduct. I hope, I do not offend you, gentlemen; I mean no reflection on individuals; nor do I

think your profeſſion contains men of diſpoſitions naturally worſe than thoſe of others. I have always looked on them in the condition of children, fondled and careſſed, not on account of perſonal merit, but of what is apprehended to be due to their condition. Hence their falſe opinion of their own importance; their ſuperciliouſneſs, almoſt characteriſtic; and their uncommon impatience and reſentment of contradiction and advice.

CLERGYMAN.

We ſhall fall under your deſcription, if we are angry at what you ſay. Let us therefore haſten to our ſubject, if you pleaſe; only give us leave to aſſure you, that you will have nothing to apprehend from us, in your freeſt animadverſions on our orders and inſtitutions.

PHILOSOPHER.

You will be kind enough to ſet me right, if I ſhould be miſtaken in alluding to facts, which you may be better acquainted with than I am.

CLERGYMAN.

We will.

PHILOSOPHER.

I was brought up in the firm belief of the chriſtian religion, and of the popular doctrines ſuppoſed to be contained in it. Rather by the converſation of ſprightly young people, than by reading or conſideration, I ſoon came to apprehend that thoſe doctrines were in general falſe; but I retained a confuſed notion of the truth of chriſtianity. Some peculiar circumſtances of my life, and a turn for enquiry, led me to conſider the New Teſtament with all the ſkill I was poſſeſſed of. The goſpel appeared to me to contain a plain and honeſt account of the life and inſtructions of Chriſt. The character of that extraordinary perſon, to ſay the leaſt of him, is drawn as without blemiſh; the furtheſt that could be from ambition, avarice, or any hurtful paſſion; indefatigable in doing good; patient under injuries; the moſt reſigned, benevolent, and amiable that can be conceived. His religion is ſimple; and adapted

to

to every capacity: it is founded on the plaineſt principles of pious and moral obligation; and inforces its injunctions by the important doctrine of *life and immortality*. This religion being, more immediately, ſet in oppoſition to that of the Jews, engaged the attention of the Jewiſh prieſts; and brought on its author a perſecution, which ſoon effected his death. This, like all other religious perſecutions, was conducted with ſo much injuſtice and cruelty, that it defeated its own deſigns; inſtead of deſtroying a ſcheme in its firſt opening, gave it the moſt effectual aſſiſtance; and the *death of Chriſt* has by you divines been very properly ſaid to be the *ſalvation of the world*, ſo far as the influence of his religion has been admitted on the diſpoſitions and morals of men. His diſciples availed themſelves of the general deteſtation of his ill-treatment; and aſſumed a courage in his cauſe, of which ſome of them ſeemed before to be incapable. They propagated his religion with an enthuſiaſm, which when united to integrity is ever effec-

tual; with a ſelf-denial, patience of ſuffering and contempt of death, which nothing could conquer: and though their lives were leſs perfect, and their inſtructions leſs ſimple, clear and conſiſtent than thoſe of their maſter; yet they exhibited extraordinary characters, and propagated his religion with great rapidity. Wherever they came, they attracted public notice: and either from the apprehenſions of the magiſtrate, or from the miſbehavior of their own followers, they were perſecuted by the civil power. We do not find, notwithſtanding, that they ever queſtioned the authority of civil power in the affairs of religion. They were ever ready to ſubmit to its deciſions, and to ſuffer from it the ſevereſt puniſhments.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

I muſt beg leave to interrupt you, Sir.—Does not our Savior ſay, *My kingdom is not of this world:* and one of his apoſtles, when he was required not to preach any more in the name of Jeſus, appealed to thoſe who made

made the injunction, *whether it was not better to obey God rather than man?*

PHILOSOPHER.

Our Savior ſaid with truth that his kingdom was not of this world. If I remember rightly, he ſaid ſo, when he found it was expected he would aim at civil power, and uſe it in the proſecution of his great deſign. He aimed at no ſuch thing; his views were of a moral nature; and the only dominion he wiſhed to have, was of the moral and religious kind. Beſides, he poſſibly had in view the other world as the ſeat of his dominion. However, I think he could not mean to ſay, that the civil magiſtrate ſhould never avail himſelf of the aſſiſtance of religion for the benefit of his government, and the happineſs of his ſubjects,—The apoſtle indeed aſſerts a right of diſobeying the magiſtrate; but not the unlawfulneſs or the inexpediency of the magiſtrate's interference in matters of religion. He conceived himſelf to be commiſſioned immediately of God to preach the religion of Chriſt. He offered

to prove his commiſſion by miracles; and very properly ſays, that in ſuch a caſe it is better to obey God than man. In ſhort, the apoſtles ſeem to me every where, to conſider the religious and civil duties of the firſt chriſtians as at variance, in this particular buſineſs of introducing a new religion: they do not diſallow of the latter; but they deemed the former ſo much more obligatory upon themſelves, that they rejoiced in ſufferings, and murmured not at thoſe who inflicted them.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

I do not underſtand your doctrine.

WHIG.

I could wiſh to have it a little more explained.

CLERGYMAN.

He plainly means, that it is expedient the civil magiſtrate ſhould interpoſe in religious concerns; and that the conduct of the apoſtles, even when ſuffering from the civil power, inſtead of invalidating confirms that opinion. If he can make my friend here

reliſh

reliſh the doctrine, he will do what I have often attempted in vain.

PHILOSOPHER.

I have, hardly ever, been able to perſuade a man to relinquiſh an opinion which he has harbored and cheriſhed for a long while. I ſhall not therefore think ill of your friend, if I ſhould leave him nothing pertinent to ſay, and he ſhould ſtill adhere to his beloved ſentiments.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

Your terms are rather humiliating: you ſeem prepared to deſpiſe every thing I can ſay.

PHILOSOPHER.

Upon my word, I never intended to convey any ſuch meaning; and I am ſorry you ſhould think ſo: I only meant that I would converſe, and even diſpute with the temper of a true philoſopher, or if you pleaſe with the charity of a true chriſtian, to which I hope you can have no objection; and that I ſhould not be angry if when, in my opinion, I had ſet the matter in the cleareſt light, you

ſhould

ſhould not ſee it, and ſhould retain your former ſentiments.

COURTIER.

Come—that is an apology for a lord.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

I am perfectly ſatisfied.

PHILOSOPHER.

I have always thought, that man, being formed with religious diſpoſitions, and his religion being, not meerly a private and perſonal concern, but of a public and ſocial nature, it was impoſſible to form a government and to exclude the influence of religion. And I found, upon enquiry, that no ſuch government had ever been formed. It was always a principle of religion that providence (under the denomination of God or Gods) directed the public and private events of human life. People therefore acknowledged it, not only in the private duties of perſonal gratitude, but by a public and national devotion. Hence probably, the origin of public worſhip; for which it was found expedient to inſtitute an order of men who might expreſs

expreſs the public ſentiments; and exhibit thoſe various ſigns of gratitude, humility, &c. which were agreed upon, and uſed as aſſiſtances to the various acts of the mind. It would be natural to ſuppoſe, if we had not facts to inform us, that ſuch an inſtitution could not be a thing of indifference in any community, and that the legiſlature muſt always take cognizance of it. The conſequence of neglect would ſoon be the inſignificance of the legiſlature: for the prieſt having found what Archimedes wanted, another world to ſet his foot upon, would ſoon move and agitate this according to his intereſt and pleaſure. This is a truth ſo obvious, that from the foundation of the world it never failed to ſtrike every man who attempted to form a government, or to give a regular ſyſtem of laws.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

I muſt object, that thoſe who formed communities and kingdoms in the early ages of the world, cannot be ſaid by their conduct to furniſh a certain proof of any truth.

PHILOSOPHER.

They furniſh a preſumption in favour of a truth which has been laid down in a clear and reaſonable propoſition.

WHIG.

The beſt objection to what you ſay, is, that the prieſts of antiquity, were thoſe of ſuperſtition; and were the ready tools of any government, whatever it happened to be.

PHILOSOPHER.

I do not apprehend this to be an objection: for if I prove that any meaſure is founded in nature, in truth, in expediency; any inſtances of its abuſe will not affect my argument. I am ſenſible that the influence of religion has been abuſed; ſo has the power of the civil magiſtrate; and both about the ſame time, and by the ſame perſons. Every petty tyrant who domineered over a village, which he called his kingdom, not only diſpoſed of the properties and lives of his wretched ſubjects, but tranſacted their buſineſs with the gods, and found his ſecurity and importance to ariſe as much from his

ſacred

ſacred, as from his regal office. In ſtates of better policy, whoſe governments were formed on ſyſtems, and whoſe laws and manners have been the admiration of ſucceeding ages, religion was a public concern, and its prieſts were under the direction and in the ſervice of the government. The jewiſh ſyſtem had religion more immediately for its object, and its prieſts had the direction of temporal as well as ſpiritual matters. This was the ſtate of things when chriſtianity was introduced. I have already obſerved that the conduct of our Saviour and his apoſtles, was that of perſons who acknowledged the authority of the magiſtrate, in the outward regulations of religion. They complied with the cuſtoms and ceremonies of the jewiſh law, though their purpoſe was to ſet them aſide; and endeavoured to diſcharge their duty to God, in executing an extraordinary commiſſion which they had received from him, in a manner the moſt conſiſtent with the obedience which was due from every man to the laws of his country. And when they found they were conſidered

ſidered as offenders, they had no alternative, but to deſert their duty to God, or to ſubmit to the puniſhment which thoſe laws inflicted.

CLERGYMAN.

You would then juſtify the crucifixion of our Saviour?

PHILOSOPHER.

By no means: He was not adjudged by the laws which he was ſuppoſed to have tranſgreſſed. The proceedings againſt him formed one continued ſcene of injuſtice and violence. The magiſtrates would have been juſtifiable in putting his pretenſions to a fair trial; the conſequence of which would probably have been, that he would have convinced them of their truth.

CLERGYMAN.

Is it not a ſtrange paradox to ſay, that our Saviour and his apoſtles were commiſſioned by God to do a thng which they could not do without diſobedience to the laws; which laws it was their duty to obey?

PHILOSOPHER.

There are not many propoſitions which appear to me further from a paradox; indeed it ſuppoſes an interference of duties; a doctrine, in the general ſyſtem of human obligations, as common, and as important, as almoſt any one of morality. So imperfect are all civil inſtitutions, that the obligations ariſing from them, muſt very often interfere with thoſe of morality. What I have ſaid, therefore, you will be obliged to acquieſce in. The laws of the jewiſh government were obligatory on the ſubjects of that government. The chriſtian religion was deſigned to ſubvert that of the Jews; and the propagators of that religion could not do otherwiſe than tranſgreſs the laws of their country. I do not reflect on them; I highly applaud their conduct.

CLERGYMAN.

You have not yet reconciled me to what you ſaid.

COURTIER.

Pray, do not let us have a religious controverſy.

PHILOSOPHER.

I am ſorry the time will not admit my being more explicit;—my principal object lies forward; and, in order to lead to it, I was going to obſerve, that when the friends of chriſtianity had ſtruggled with, and overcome many uncommon difficulties, and had obtained a firm footing for their religion in the world, they did not ſhew any reluctance to receive the countenance and aſſiſtance of the civil magiſtrate; nay, the firſt Emperor who eſtabliſhed their religion by law, though of a bad moral character, has had a veil thrown over his faults, and it has been deemed almoſt a ſin to ſay any thing to his diſadvantage; and his ſucceſſors have been repreſented as ſaints or ſinners, according as they have, or have not favoured the church. In the decline of the empire, while the civil power was becoming contemptible, the church gradually ſeparated from it, and claimed, firſt, an independancy, and then a ſuperiority over meerly temporal power. The church of Rome has given a ſtriking ſpecimen of the amazing

amazing influence of the miniſters of religion on the minds of men; and ſhewn in the affairs of Europe what, in ſmaller degrees, may be expected in communities, when the public religion is not under the direction of the ſtate. At the Reformation in England, the church was put under the power of the government, and the king was made its head. It has ſince made a few ſtruggles for independance; but they have been to no purpoſe, unleſs it was to put the legiſlature in mind of thoſe reſtraints which were neceſſary to keep it in order.

CLERGYMAN.

You ſeem to talk of the church as unfriendly to the ſtate. I thought, juſt now, that you conſidered religion as friendly to the happineſs of the community, and that it became more ſo, when in the hands of the civil power, than when left to make its way among the people.

PHILOSOPHER.

Yes; or rather, when left in the hands of its miniſters.—I may have fallen into a com-

mon inaccuracy in the uſe of the word religion. The influence which is any way derived from religion, by hypocrites and wicked prieſts, as well as by good and pious men, is called, without diſtinction, the influence of religion. Allowing, therefore, for this latitude (which however I do not recollect to have taken) I may have blamed religion when nothing could be further from my meaning.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

The apoſtles are juſtified in their diſobedience to the civil power, you ſeem to think, only by their extraordinary commiſſion: how then will you juſtify the reformers who had not ſuch a commiſſion?

PHILOSOPHER.

Some of them imagined they had, and were commendable in acting accordingly. But the reformation was carried on under the conduct of the civil power; and I juſtify it as I would any attempt of a government, to recover or to improve itſelf. I have nothing favourable to ſay of the private views of ſome who

who were concerned. I conſider it as I do a ſtruggle in ſtates for rights, which had been uſurped by an enormous and pernicious power. In all violent conteſts many faults will be committed; and the main, ſalutary object will ſometimes be obtained by indirect means. Thoſe who have recourſe to ſuch means, have no ſhare of the merit, and while the benefit is enjoyed, their actions are deteſted.

CLERGYMAN.

The power of the church of Rome was ſupported in the ſame manner with that of any ſtate.

PHILOSOPHER.

I am not entirely of that opinion: if it was, and Europe conſidered as its empire, any part of that empire, as any part of a ſtate, conceiving its privileges to be uſurped, and that it might recover them, had a right to do ſo, and to aſſume that form of government which appeared moſt beneficial. The reformers not only aſſerted the natural right of private judgment, but the independance

of particular governments, and their right of managing their own concerns both ſpiritual and temporal.

WHIG.

I hardly think they aſſerted the right of private judgment; nor do I think your plan friendly to it, when you put religion entirely under the direction of the civil magiſtrate.

PHILOSOPHER.

I have ſome doubts myſelf about their having aſſerted the right of private judgment. They certainly did not intend to allow that right to others. They claimed it for themſelves, and ſometimes inſiſted on it as a natural and religious right, but they reſtrained the exerciſe of it by individuals, who were to be directed by councils, or by the laws of particular governments.

WHIG.

Was not what they did right, according to your ſyſtem?

PHILOSOPHER.

You will ſee it was not. When I ſay, religion ſhould be under the direction of the

magiſtrate, I mean the public and ſocial acts of it, to be countenanced and employed as the public and ſocial actions of morality are, for the public good.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

It does not want that countenance; it would do better without it.

PHILOSOPHER.

That is more than you can tell; for it never has had the trial. Would morality do better without it? Would the community be happier if there were no laws to ſecure the performance of moral duties? But I would leave religion more at large; and yet I think it ſhould be under the direction of the magiſtrate.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

You muſt imagine that I ſhall not eaſily admit this principle, againſt the moſt diſtinguiſhing one of our party: it would reflect diſhonour on thoſe brave ſpirits who firſt dared to diſſent, and laid the foundation of that liberty, perhaps civil as well as religious, which we now enjoy.

PHILOSOPHER.

I assure you, that I am far from being disposed to reflect on them. I approve of their conduct in many respects, as I give credit to the honesty of their views. I consider every man as at liberty to disobey the laws of his country; and the magistrate as having a right to punish him for that disobedience. If he ventures to incur the penalty in order to discharge his conscience, and to procure a public advantage, though he may be mistaken, he is to be commended.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

Every Christian, in my opinion, should acknowledge Christ only as the head of the church. We are expresly enjoined, in this respect, to call no man master, and to stand fast in the liberty wherewith he has made us free.

PHILOSOPHER.

I do not dispute your opinion, that Christ is the head of the church: he is the founder of the christian religion; and no man has a right to change the principles, or repeal the

laws of that inſtitution. His diſciples are to take their inſtructions from his goſpel, every one for himſelf; to call no man maſter, and to ſtand faſt in their liberty.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

Well; and what then is the power of the magiſtrate?

PHILOSOPHER.

The ſame I have always aſſerted it to be; that of countenancing religion; preventing the abuſe of religious influence, and directing it to the benefit of the public. This may be done, leaving the ſubject all the exerciſe of private judgment, which is neceſſary to perſonal happineſs. I would wiſh, therefore, to have a religious eſtabliſhment in every State.

WHIG.

What, ſuch a one as the church of England?

PHILOSOPHER.

I would have it as well ſuited to the beſt conſtitution, as the Engliſh church is to the Engliſh conſtitution.

COURTIER.

Do you take the conſtitution of the church to be as good as that of the ſtate?

PHILOSOPHER.

I take the church to be a part of the ſtate, and to partake largely of its excellencies and defects. The condition of religious and civil liberty is nearly the ſame; enjoyed in conſiderable degrees by the ſubject, but with little proviſion for their improvement and ſecurity.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

But how will you account for an eſtabliſhment ſuch as that of the Engliſh church, from the commiſſions, precepts, or any parts of the goſpel.

PHILOSOPHER.

I look upon the goſpel, in regard to churches, to be what the natural principles of morality are, in regard to governments. I diſlike the conſtitution of a church as I do that of ſtate, in proportion as the one or the other defeats the purpoſes of the goſpel or of nature. The church, like the government, of

of England, aroſe out of a ſyſtem unfavorable to perſonal liberty; and like that, has been gradually loſing its pernicious powers, as the people have advanced in their juſt and reaſonable claims. They are ſo united that both will probably ſhare the ſame fate; they will either improve together, and yield mutual aid in promoting public happineſs, or will fall together in any general confuſion and ruin.

COURTIER.

Well then, as you have given your opinion of ſome amendments in one part of the conſtitution, let us have it on thoſe which may be expedient in the other.

PHILOSOPHER.

I really wiſh to ſee many alterations in the church. I am not of the opinion of thoſe who think it ſo perfect that it cannot be improved,

WHIG.

—But of thoſe who think it like a ruinous building, which if you but touch, will fall about your ears.

PHILOSOPHER.

I am not of that opinion neither. I think, leaving the outlines of its preſent form, it may be ſo amended, and put into a ſtate ſo improving, as to become highly beneficial to government, and greatly conducive to private piety and happineſs.

COURTIER.

Then you keep to us our biſhops: they are very uſeful members of a houſe of lords.

PHILOSOPHER.

I would keep to the preſent form of church-government as much as may be, not becauſe it is in itſelf the moſt agreeable to apoſtolic conduct which may be conceived; but becauſe it has ſprung up with our preſent civil conſtitution; is ſuited to it; and will admit the beſt kind of improvements as that admits them.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

What need of all this delay and caution? Why, when the rights of men are acknowledged, ſhould not they be enjoyed? Why ſhould not we, at once, return to that ſimplicity

plicity of religious government and conduct which we aim at?

PHILOSOPHER.

Religious rights are not enjoyed, for the ſame reaſons that civil ones are not. I wiſh the ſtate of government admitted of both in the utmoſt extent. We cannot return at once into that ſimplicity of religious government which you wiſh for. It would be diſcordant with the civil, and be productive of much greater evils than the preſent with all its imperfections. To aim therefore at the introduction of a form of church diſcipline into our government, which is fit only for a democracy, is aiming to introduce a certain miſchief. This has been the error of the diſſenters. They have been, generally, republicans; they have probably wiſhed to ſee the government formed into a republic; they have made ſome unſucceſsful attempts this way, which ſerved only to convince the moſt reaſonable among them, that the people were not prepared for ſuch a change. When they found this impracticable, they yet retained

tained the republican forms of church government, and ſtruggled hard to get them tolerated.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

You ſpeak rather ſlightingly of a people, who are conſidered by moderate church-men, as having by their diſſent been of great ſervice to the liberties of their country.

PHILOSOPHER.

I have ever had the ſame opinion of their conduct; and yet I hope I may be excuſed if I think them not blameleſs. The Puritans dared to diſſent; for trifles God knows; but they opened the way for a better and more reaſonable ſeparation.

CLERGYMAN.

But were not the diſſenters criminal in departing from the eſtabliſhment, and diſturbing the public peace, for trifles?

PHILOSOPHER.

The government, you know, held them ſo; and puniſhed them accordingly.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

Yes;—but were they really criminal?

PHILOSOPHER.

In a political ſenſe, they were; as every man muſt be who does an action which is prohibited by the laws of his country. Accordingly, in every ſeverity againſt the Puritans, the reaſons moſtly inſiſted upon are, their contempt of the prerogative, and diſobedience to the laws.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

We glory in their conduct; that they dared, at the higheſt riſque, to diſobey a power, which was tyrannical and deſtructive of liberty.

PHILOSOPHER.

I do not commend the power, which as you ſay was nearly arbitrary. But it was the power then in being; and diſobedience to it was a civil offence. The man who thought he could recover any natural right, or procure a great public benefit, by diſobeying that power and ſuffering the penalty, and had courage to act upon his principles, deſerves to be commended, as he probably led

led the way to a well-conducted and beneficial oppoſition.

CLERGYMAN.

Then you think the oppoſition of the diſſenters has aſſiſted in gaining our preſent liberties. I am apt to think their oppoſition irritated; and prevented that natural progreſs and improvement of our conſtitution which might have been expected.

PHILOSOPHER.

There is ſomething plauſible in what you ſay: and I have ſometimes thought that I ſhould have taken up the ſame opinion, if I had not been prepoſſeſſed in favor of what has had ſuch happy conſequences. When a public benefit is obtained, I am partial to the means of it; and ſometimes think they could not have ſo well procured by others which promiſed better in ſpeculation. There is however ſomething that offends me in the political maxim, that an oppoſition is neceſſary in every free ſtate. Good conſequences often ariſe from oppoſition; but it is more or leſs an evil; at leaſt it is ſo in general.

neral. Every government, once eſtabliſhed, has ſomething like a principle of ſelf-preſervation, againſt which every oppoſition will be a civil offence. Some governments have a tendency to increaſe their power, and verge more and more towards deſpotiſm. The people, on the other hand, having given up many of their natural rights, are generally inclined to recover them, and diſpoſed to complain and diſobey. Theſe things are evils in our eſtimation: the former productive of oppreſſors and tyrants; the latter of mobs and ſeditions. They have their benefits however; the latter eſpecially.—The firſt man that complains, does it perhaps upon a ſlight pretence: as oppreſſions increaſe, others are furniſhed with better reaſons; and contrary to the general duty of citizens venture to diſobey and reſiſt the legal authority. This was the caſe of the Puritans in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Will you ſay, that under her and the houſe of Stuart, the government would have improved into any thing favorable to liberty, if they had

had not ventured to rebel, as you may call it. I think ſuch an opinion has not the leaſt probability.

CLERGYMAN.

Why not? The conſtitution is really improved; and not by their means: for the civil war ended firſt in anarchy; then in the tyranny of Cromwell: and when Richard ſucceeded his father, the people were ſo harraſſed and unhappy, that they gladly countenanced the firſt of the contending leaders who propoſed to reſtore things only to their former ſtate. During the reign of Charles the ſecond, the diſſenters were conſidered as public enemies, and guarded againſt as ſuch by many expreſs laws.

PHILOSOPHER.

They were certainly enemies to the government which Charles's miniſtry wanted to eſtabliſh; and that miniſtry acted as a friend to its own ſyſtem, by diſcouraging them. This does not prove that they had been intirely wrong in the late tranſactions; or that the conſtitution had received no benefit

nefit by their oppoſition. In their firſt ſtand againſt Charles the firſt, they were not ſufficiently prepared for the part they had to act. They had reaſon to be diſpleaſed with the ſyſtem which then took place, and by which they were greatly oppreſſed. A few of them joined their friends in the eſtabliſhment, and took ſome regular ſteps towards obtaining a legal redreſs of grievances: but their body wanted, what they called, a thorough reformation; an entire change of government in church and ſtate; than which nothing could well have been imagined more extravagant and impracticable. They had not ſettled what this change ſhould conſiſt in; and when the civil war had thrown the power into their hands, they were in the utmoſt confuſion; and a bold uſurper ſeized the occaſion, and made himſelf more deſpotic than the deluded king whom they had juſt put to death. This extraordinary perſon had a difficult part to act; but his talents were great and various: he was ſubtle, and verſatile; he ſoon ſaw the character of an-

other, but concealed his own, and aſſumed what appearance he pleaſed: he was perſonally brave, and had an army much at his devotion: he removed ſome abuſes, while he introduced others, and amuſed the people with changes and projects for the public ſettlement and happineſs: he reſtored the military credit of his country, and by that means ſoothed its pride:—In ſhort, by uncommon talents, he conducted a ſtate of things which would have perplexed and ruined almoſt any other man. When he died, the nature of his government appeared; it hardly preſerved itſelf a day; every thing was ſoon in confuſion; and it could not be a matter of wonder that the people conſented to exchange anarchy, and the proſpect of a ſecond civil war, even for the government which they had lately endeavoured to throw off. In this manner, any oppoſition ſet on foot upon the beſt principles, may be productive of the worſt conſequences, and fail of its deſign. I am not of opinion however, that it was without its good effects. It put the nation upon

upon enquiries into the nature of government; it increaſed the number of diſſenters, whom I have always conſidered as a corps de reſerve for the beſt friends of the conſtitution; not fit to lead the way in an important conteſt, but to ſupport thoſe that are ſo. The miniſters of Charles the ſecond were of this opinion, and the diſſenters were objects of their averſion. They puniſhed them indeed upon plauſible pretences, for in the late tranſactions they had often behaved ill, and were not fit to be truſted with power under the new government. However the miniſters were made to tremble by the ſpirit which had been raiſed principally by the diſſenters; and were obliged to give way to laws and regulations the moſt favorable to liberty. The diſſenters ſtruggled with power during that reign and the next; and at the revolution, obtained a conſiderable advantage; an event which would never have taken place but for the civil war in the reign of Charles the firſt.

COURTIER.

Our friend here could probably ſay a better might.

PHILOSOPHER.

That would not be ſaying any thing to the purpoſe. How can any man ſay, what might have been? It appears probable to me, that the government would ſoon have become arbitrary; and that we ſhould have been at this time in the condition of moſt of our neighbours.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

It ſeems, we have only to give you time, and you will come round to our principles.

PHILOSOPHER.

It is very poſſible, that I may entertain ſome of your principles; but I do not know all of them; and I believe do not entertain them. I agree with you in the doctrine of reſiſtance; and I think you valuable as you exhibit to power a proof that it is not omnipotent.

COURTIER.

You would wiſh not then to have our eſtabliſhment changed for Preſbytery.

PHILOSOPHER.

In truth I would not. I have ſaid it would be unſuitable to our form of government. You ſee, therefore, that I am not in all points a preſbyterian.

WHIG.

I have a notion we ſhall not find you a good church-man, in all points, when we come to know your ſentiments of the church.

PHILOSOPHER.

If I had the power of reforming, I would have the government of the church in its preſent form; by arch-biſhops, biſhops, &c. for the reaſons I have already mentioned.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

What authority have you in ſcripture for arch-biſhops, biſhops, &c?

PHILOSOPHER.

What authority have you in nature for Emperors, Kings, &c?—You muſt take with you, Sir, that in religion, as well as in politics, I am not imagining the beſt that may be conceived, but the moſt expedient

and practicable in our circumſtances. I dream dreams, and ſee viſions as well as the beſt of you; but I keep them for my private amuſement; and am obliged to leave them quite out of ſight when I propoſe any thing practical to the world about me. Judging in this manner, you will not wonder that I think the preſent church the beſt ſuited to the ſtate of any that can be imagined. But in order to anſwer its purpoſe on the public devotion, manners and happineſs, the church ſhould keep pace with the ſtate in alterations and improvements; and its rulers ſhould avoid that adherence to original principles and that idea of perfection ſo unſuitable to any human inſtitution.

It would take up too much time, to enumerate the inconveniences of many eccleſiaſtical powers, the regulation of which would have the approbation of the whole kingdom. What I ſhall inſiſt upon, as of the moſt importance, are the terms of admiſſion into holy orders, and the preſent ſtate of public worſhip.

Hardly

Hardly any thing can be of greater importance to a community, than the character of its religious miniſters. Let the religion itſelf be ever ſo perfect; let its principles be plain and indiſputable, and its precepts conciſe and ſimple; yet its credit and influence with the people in general, will be only in proportion to thoſe of its miniſters. I hold that maxim therefore to be falſe, that without injury to the public, a man's morals may be vicious, if his doctrines be good.—The church of England, at its firſt eſtabliſhment, was well ſuited to the genius and principles of the times, and, as I ſaid before, roſe naturally with that form of government which then took place. The ſcriptures were but little read or underſtood; doctrines and creeds were formed by ſynods and councils, and appointed to be the principles of religion. Upon the ſeparation of the church of England from that of Rome, we cannot wonder that the reformers proceeded as they did. At that time, all men knowing but little of the goſpel, believed in

a church. It would have been miraculous to have had one without articles and creeds as ſummaries of the prevailing divinity. To ſay they had no right to form them, is ſaying nothing to the purpoſe; for the whole legiſlature, with the conſent of the people, have a right to do any thing.

CLERGYMAN.

I think you are miſtaken, in repreſenting the religious proceedings of thoſe times, as the acts of the whole legiſlature.

PHILOSOPHER.

Perhaps I may; and ſhould have ſaid, under the protection of the legiſlature; but that is not material. What deſerves notice is, that while the civil part of the conſtitution has been actually improving; the eccleſiaſtical part, in order to be accommodated to it, has, only by diſuſe and the interference of civil laws, loſt ſome of its pernicious powers. By the progreſs of philoſophy, and by the ſtudy of the Scriptures, our religious creed is totally changed; and yet our eccleſiaſtical articles remain the ſame. Here is another

another inſtance of the impropriety of annexing to a conſtitution, the idea of perfection; for we owe to that idea, the preſent gothic appearance of the church, and the litrle credit and influence of its clergy. That ſpirit of enquiry which the reformation gave riſe to did not long confine itſelf to the church of Rome, but, in time, viewed the new fabrick which had been erected, and found, as may be ſuppoſed, that it was not perfect in all its parts. In proportion as men advanced in knowledge, they ſaw in the eſtabliſhment a greater number of miſtakes. I ſay nothing of the objections made to it by the firſt puritans, on account of dreſſes and ceremonies; they were trivial, and they would not be to my preſent purpoſe. The firſt great miſchief of the eſtabliſhment took place, when men came to diſbelieve its articles and creeds: for having a power to require the belief of them, it checked enquiry, and made many unbelievers, hypocrites, and knaves. The diſſenters dared openly to deny the authority of this eſtabliſhment in indifferent or uneſſential

matters;

matters; and they ſtruggled and ſuffered, perhaps, in general, upon wrong principles, 'till they obtained a partial and imperfect toleration. Not conſiſting of the moſt improved people in the country, they held the eſtabliſhed principles with the ſame tenaciouſneſs, as the moſt bigotted in the church, and diſputed for little or nothing more than to be excuſed from wearing ſurplices or gowns; to have the liberty of aſſembling in places where there were no bells, no organ, no ceremonies, and where their miniſters might pray and preach without book. Whatever advantages theſe people might imagine, they had obtained to themſelves, the evils of creeds and of articles remained in the church, and have, at this time, the worſt effects upon the principles and morals of the country.

CLERGYMAN.

You know, no man is enjoined to believe them; that belief is made only the condition of certain advantages: if any man will ſacrifice his integrity to the proſpect of them, the

the fault is in the man, and not in the articles and creeds.

PHILOSOPHER.

I do not pretend to excuſe the man who will act ſo diſhoneſt a part; and I blame the creeds only, as they furniſh a temptation which ſome men, of integrity in every other caſe, have not been able to reſiſt. When a man has ſpent the early and beſt part of his time in an education which will ſuit only the profeſſion of a clergyman, he has the alternative, to ſtarve, or to violate his honour. When he has taken one ſtep out of the way, and has involved himſelf in the connections and cares of a family, if a proviſion offers; I do not wonder that he proceeds; I greatly pity the man, and am tempted to curſe the inſtitution that makes it almoſt neceſſary that he ſhould loſe his peace to obtain his ſubſiſtence.

COURTIER.

I believe you need be under no ſuch concern. The gentlemen of that order are as eaſy about ſubſcriptions, as if they thoroughly under-

underſtood, and believed every thing enjoined them. In the univerſity, they are accuſtomed betimes to take oaths, and write their names to, they know not what; and it is an eaſy ſtep to what they do not believe.

PHILOSOPHER.

Suppoſing what you have ſaid to be true, I rather pity than cenſure the candidates: but I can hardly think, with patience, of the inſtitutions under which they are educated. It is a maxim in morality, that the mind of a young perſon will take almoſt any direction you may chuſe to give it. Perſons have been led by education, to think vice virtue, and virtue vice, in many material inſtances. It is not ſtrange therefore, that in a gay and thoughtleſs time of life, they ſhould be led to ſuppreſs their curioſity, and do they not what to be entitled to a ſubſiſtence or to affluence.

WHIG.

What think you of the faſhionable principle of ſubmitting to the tenets and creeds of a church, as articles of peace?

PHILOSOPHER.

Conſult your bible; conſult any moral writings; conſult even plays and farces, and, if you find ſuch a conduct countenanced, I will never ſay a word more againſt the church, I will ſwear and ſubſcribe to any thing, and turn clergyman myſelf. All the ſophiſtry of a fallen angel, will not reconcile to honeſty and honour, the conduct of a man who ſwears and ſubſcribes to what he does not believe.

CLERGYMAN.

I cannot ſuffer ſeveral of my friends, whom I know to be men of honour and integrity to lie under the imputation which is couched in your laſt words. They ſay, that ſome of the doctrines to which they ſubſcribe, cannot be underſtood; and others, they do not believe. Theſe things are known. The governors of the church require them outwardly to ſubſcribe to its inſtitutions; and they do ſo for form, and are often underſtood ſo to do; they are not guilty of any fraud, or any concealed diſhoneſty.

PHILOSOPHER.

Suppoſe I was to ſay, they are guilty of open diſhoneſty; how would you contradict me with any appearance of reaſon? Indeed, the more this matter is enquired into, the worſe it appears: you had better therefore be content with what I had ſaid, that it is a reproach to a religious eſtabliſhment, that it leads many of its members out of the plain path of integrity and honour. In matters of conſcience, there is never any difficulty; things inſtantly appear fit or unfit; and ſophiſtry, and even reaſoning is ſeldom wanted to direct the moral conduct of an honeſt man. When I am required to do any thing *bona fide*, or *ex animo*, in order to obtain an advantage; and I do it only for form or for peace, I obtain the advantage, without fulfilling the condition. I may adduce circumſtances that may palliate and excuſe my conduct, but it will be judged morally wrong, as long as men retain their ſenſe of good and evil.

CLERGYMAN.

You ſeem to have had your mind prepoſſeſſed by the many virulent things which have been lately written againſt the church and the clergy.

PHILOSOPHER.

You are much miſtaken I aſſure you. I have never read more than one book on the ſubject; and, that as a matter of curioſity, and in a curſory way. I ſee by the papers, that not only the diſſenters keep up the buſtle with you, but that they are aided by ſome of your own ſons. I have not, as I told you, read any of the controverſy, ancient or modern; for I have obſerved, in other caſes, that when divines are antagoniſts, they are more abuſive than other men, and draw out their diſputes to ſuch a length, that hardly any patience can bear them. Perhaps your ſuſpicion aroſe from the ſimilarity of my ſentiments to ſome of thoſe which have been lately advanced. If you have any opinion of my judgment, this adds ſomething to their authority.

CLERGYMAN.

But give me leave to obſerve, that you, as well as the writers we now talk of, beg the queſtion in this argument. You take for granted what you ought to prove, that the clergy do not believe the articles and creeds of the church.

PHILOSOPHER.

It is not ſaid, I ſuppoſe, that all of them have departed from the original principles of the eſtabliſhment; but it is known that many of them have. Their converſation, their preaching, their writings prove it beyond a doubt.

CLERGYMAN.

In every profeſſion there are, and ever will be, ſome who are not honeſt; but it is uncandid to condemn the whole for the faults of a part; much more is it to attribute thoſe faults to inſtitutions which give them no countenance.

PHILOSOPHER.

I am ſorry to find you ſo much miſtaken. I have not cenſured the order, in the preſent affair

affair. I greatly eſteem every honeſt clergyman, who has entered on his office with a clear conſcience; who preaches and lives according to thoſe inſtitutions, to which he has vowed and ſworn obedience, though his ſentiments and mine may be as different as poſſible. I pity the man who taints his innocence to obtain orders; who has not the reſolution to preſerve it, and to ſubmit to poverty, and to ſee his family want; but I cannot think his conduct morally honeſt.—I have ſaid that the Engliſh church, at its inſtitution, was the beſt that could well have been contrived: The fault I find with it, is, that it has not undergone alterations, even as the ſtate has done; and is not ſuited to the principles of religion, morality, and policy, which now prevail among us.

WHIG.

Your ſentiments are very candid; and I think no man can be diſpleaſed at them.

CLERGYMAN.

I am not diſpleaſed at them, though I may diſapprove and oppoſe them.

PHILOSOPHER.

You are extremely welcome; and I ſhould thank you for convincing me of a miſtake in this, or any other matter; 'till I am, or things are altered, I ſhall be uneaſy at the bad conſequences to my country, from what I conſider as material defects in its religious conſtitution.

CLERGYMAN.

How is your country affected by it?

PHILOSOPHER.

How, Sir? What can affect it more? If it were poſſible to have a good clergy, and a bad religion, the country would fare better than with a bad clergy and a good religion; for this reaſon, that the people, in general, never enquire into the religion itſelf, but take it as it is given them by their miniſters.

CLERGYMAN.

What, when the Scriptures are open, and often read to them?

PHILOSOPHER.

Yes, in that caſe. In every part of the proteſtant world, you may find almoſt all the people

people furniſhed with ſyſtems of faith and divinity. Theſe you will not think to have been formed by themſelves, or learnt from the ſcriptures; they are too metaphyſical and formal for either. They have been all contrived, and taught by their clergy. Theſe ſyſtems differ from each other, and all but one of them muſt be erroneous. If therefore all thoſe in error are led into it by their prieſts, in defiance of a ſcripture which they hold to be from God: can you imagine the public to be unaffected by the character of its clergy? Look into a Roman-catholic country, where people wait their deciſions with anxiety, are depreſſed by their cenſures, and rejoiced at their abſolutions, as if pronounced immediately by God. Theſe, you may ſay, are the prieſts of ſuperſtition. But ſuperſtition has not a ſtronger hold of the human mind than religion; of which it is hardly the ſhadow. If you imagine a ſtate of things much more excellent than in Italy and Spain; let the religion be plain, ſimple, purely devout and moral; let it be that of Jeſus, as delivered by

himſelf; let its prieſts be honeſt and as faithful to their religion, as thoſe of Rome are to their ſuperſtition; let them employ the ſame contrivance, the ſame aſſiduity, and you would have a *kingdom of the juſt*; every thing propheſied of ſuch a ſtate would be fulfilled, and the world would be happy, becauſe it would be virtuous.

COURTIER.

You are one of the laſt of my acquaintance that I thought would compliment the prieſthood.

WHIG.

I did not myſelf conceive, that they could ever be of ſo much importance. I had rather truſt to a good civil power than to any clergy, and yet there is ſomething plauſible in what you deduce from their influence in the church of Rome.

PHILOSOPHER.

Virtue would always have the advantage of vice, if it had the ſame countenance and encouragement.

CLERGYMAN.

You ſpoke juſt now very favourably of our clergy: notwithſtanding a ſingle deviation from virtue in ſome of them, you will allow, upon the whole, that they are much ſuperior to thoſe of Rome, both in their religion and their lives. You ſay, that ſince the reformation, knowledge has been increaſing in religion, as well as in the ſciences and arts: pray, then, how comes it to paſs that religion itſelf is fallen into diſuſe, if not diſcredit; and the character of a clergyman is becoming leſs reſpectable every day? What ſignifies talking of alterations and improvements, to be effected by men who may ſoon have no credit; for infidelity, indifference, and profligacy are continually increaſing?

PHILOSOPHER.

I believe you have now given me a rod to puniſh yourſelf. I will not, however, be haſty, for this is a ſubject of great importance. It is ſtrange, that while men are merely enthuſiaſtical and ſuperſtitious, they ſhould appear to be more religious, than

when they are enlightened and liberal. One reaſon is, that our paſſions engage us more than our underſtandings. But the queſtion ſtill remains, why ſhould people be more zealous for error, than they would be for truth? We find that miſtaken people are always the warmeſt; and that the ſame man is more tenacious of an error, than he would be of a truth; or, at leaſt, he guards the one with more warmth and paſſion than he would the other. My opinion is, that in error, a man ſeldom has an object but for his paſſions; if he has, however ſecure and confidential he may appear, he generally finds himſelf ſurrounded with dangers; he therefore doubles his diligence, and the natural attachment to his principles riſes to an uncommon warmth. In the cauſe of truth he is equally warm, while his paſſions are kept up by oppoſition; but when this is not the caſe; when every reaſonable pretenſion is admitted; when men are candid and friendly to each other in the purſuit of knowledge, their warmth ſubſides; enthuſiaſm gives place to ſereneneſs, and ſerene-

neſs

neſs degenerates into indifference. Since the reformation, as men have advanced in knowledge, their zeal has cooled: but, I think, in this caſe, things have not been permitted to take their natural courſe. If the eſtabliſhment had been gradually improved; people, perhaps, would not have been frantic in its cauſe, but they would have regarded it with a rational and ſteady eſteem. The clergy, therefore, for what has befallen them, muſt thank thoſe who have had it in their power to make the improvements I have hinted at, and have not made them. Infidelity and profligacy, you ſay, are daily increaſing; who are to blame for it? We have a body of men, whoſe ſole buſineſs it is to ſhew the truth, and ſupport the credit of religion. They pretend to believe, and I hope they do believe, that their religion came from God. When that is diſputed, how do they behave? Some of them, indeed, uſe fair argument; but they generally menace, and give the moſt opprobrious language. Is it ſtrange, that ſome of

their antagoniſts are confirmed in their ſentiments by ſuch a conduct? They ſuſpect that the clergy are hypocrites; and defend a cauſe which they are conſcious to be a bad one; but which they defend for what they can get by it. Beſides, an unbeliever may very plauſibly ſay,—'Can theſe people believe their 'religion to be from God, and yet treat it 'with ſo much indignity, as to ſubſtitute 'human ſyſtems in its ſtead? Can they be 'ſerious in their belief of another world, and 'the events which are to take place there, 'and yet riſque them for ſome ſmall advan-'tages here? They ſay their religion muſt 'be divine, becauſe it promotes the intereſt 'of truth; and yet they, the miniſters of 'this religion, make a jeſt of truth; ſolemnly 'appeal to the Deity in what they do not be-'lieve; and in the moſt deliberate manner, 'declare their aſſent and conſent to what they 'apprehend to be falſe. Shall we, therefore, 'believe what ſuch men ſay of the divinity 'of their religion? It is all impoſture; all 'a farce!'—In this manner people reaſon;

ſome

ſome are made infidels; and others are confirmed in their infidelity. And what influence do you think ſuch miniſters can have over the profligacy of the age? Articles and creeds operate in a very different way from what was intended by their makers, or by thoſe who appointed them as ſecurities to the faith of the church. They ſhut out men of integrity, who deviate ever ſo little from them, and let in any one who will pretend to believe. I do not mean that every one who ſubſcribes is a knave; but that in all probability, many knaves do ſubſcribe. And theſe men are to guard and improve the morals of the people.

CLERGYMAN.

Would you have no ſubſcription at all; and every man who choſe it, ſuffered to undertake the office?

PHILOSOPHER.

If you could point out any ſervice that ſubſcription can be of, I would wiſh to have it required. I never could ſee any thing but miſchief ariſe out of it.

CLERGYMAN.

Men of the moſt profligate principles would then come in.

PHILOSOPHER.

And do articles ſhut them out? Are you freer from ſuch men than the diſſenters, where the profeſſion is open to any one who will undertake it, as long as his character is decent, and his capacity and abilities are ſuch as qualify him for his office.

CLERGYMAN.

But do not the diſſenters require ſubſcription; or what is equivalent, a confeſſion of faith?

PHILOSOPHER.

They have required it at what they call the ordination of the miniſter; and, I am told, the old prieſts among them are now unwilling to relinquiſh this apparent compliment to them, from young candidates. But a miniſter would not be ſet aſide for not complying with this cuſtom; and many have been actually ordained without it. However this may be, it cannot affect my opinion,

opinion, that ſubſcriptions, articles, and creeds, have done great miſchief to religion, leſſened the influence of the clergy, and injured the principles and morals of the people. So has alſo your adherence to one invariable book of common-prayer.

WHIG.

Take care what you ſay of the book of common-prayer. It is held ſacred by the people; and the clergy extol it as the model of devotional compoſition.

PHILOSOPHER.

I do not wonder, that the people hold it in great veneration. It was formed on a ſyſtem which they have implicitly believed to be true; and it has a warmth and ſimplicity which engages the affections. Its incoherence and tautologies are ſo far from offending them, that it favours that ſolicitation and importunity of which they are fond.

CLERGYMAN.

I believe you are ſingular in your opinion that it is not a well-compoſed ſervice. Perſons of the beſt taſte have admired the ſimplicity

plicity of its ſtile, and the warmth of its devotion: every attempt to compoſe a better has failed: and the diſſenters, after all their complaints of the reſtraint it has laid on the improvement of devotional ſervices, exhibit nothing in theirs to be compared to it.

PHILOSOPHER.

I am one of the perſons who admire the ſtyle and devotion of the common-prayer, in many parts: but I think that many of the principles which run through it are ſo generally diſbelieved; there is ſo much confuſion from having ſeveral ſervices jumbled into one; and ſo many obſolete, low and indecent expreſſions, that it greatly wants reviſal:

Non equidem inſector, delendave carmina Livi
Eſſe reor; ———
—— Sed emendata videri,
Pulchraque, & exactis minimum diſtantia miror.

CLERGYMAN.

Well, Sir, as you treat us ſo candidly as well as freely, I ſhould do wrong in not confeſſing, that many of the moſt learned and

ſenſible

ſenſible of our clergy, are much of your opinion. But what are we to do?—To undertake an alteration would be too daring; and, in the opinion of many, would be attended with danger; for it would be encountering prejudices which are deeply rooted; and by changing and modernizing what the people have ſo great a veneration for, we ſhould deſtroy their regard for public worſhip.

PHILOSOPHER.

I am quite of another opinion; and I have attended to the public diſpoſition on this ſubject with as much care as moſt people. Some very conſiderable alterations in the common-prayer, would be ſo far from diſagreeable, that it would pleaſe the people in general who think at all on ſubjects of devotion; thoſe who do not, a few excepted, would look on any change with great indifference; and would go to church as they now do, becauſe they are told it is one of the things they muſt do in order to go to heaven.—Public worſhip is now much neglected

gleɑted by the middle rank of people, as well as by perſons of faſhion. They generally endeavour to imitate their ſuperiors; they adopt their manners, and as much as poſſible the reaſons on which they proceed; and it is now no ſtrange thing to hear a man openly ridiculing many parts of thoſe ſervices which he ſometimes attends. He is ſeldom ſo cautious as to refrain before his children or his ſervants, who eagerly catch at any thing like a reaſon againſt an attendance and a reſtraint which is ſeldom to their taſte. In this manner an indifference, if not diſlike to public worſhip is increaſing its hurtful influence. This every good man acknowledges to be an evil. It would be ſo in a great degree, if it was conſidered only as a loſs of that method of moral reſtraint and religious improvement which are ſo conducive to the welfare of every ſtate. But there is another light in which it muſt be viewed; and which to me, I confeſs, has been often ſhocking. It is, among other things, at the

bottom of that profaneneſs and irreligion which ſeem to diſtinguiſh our times.

CLERGYMAN.

Hold, hold, Sir;—what the book of common-prayer, the cauſe of our profaneneſs?

PHILOSOPHER.

The faults which are ſuffered to diſgrace it, are among its principal cauſes. People in general, high as well as low, attend only to that religion which is offered to them. If that is good, they are obliged to revere, however they may practiſe it. If that is not good, they ſeldom ſeek for any other; and they furniſh themſelves from it as much as poſſible with encouragements to the vices which they chuſe to indulge. We ſee in fact, that when men leave off going to church, they ſoon drop all religious pretences; and even a regard to God, the great preſervative of conſcience and honor, is, in a little time, evidently loſt. Who can eſtimate the miſchiefs of ſuch conſequences?

CLERGYMAN.

But if people diſapprove of the liturgy, they are at liberty to have recourſe to a better form of worſhip; and their not doing ſo, is a preſumption that their objections are only pretences to cover a real infidelity.

PHILOSOPHER.

That does not fairly follow. If the ſtate take upon it to provide a form of worſhip for the benefit of the public, and that form does not anſwer the end; what ſignifies ſaying, that the people are at liberty to provide for themſelves? They reaſon probably in this manner;—'Here is a book of public ſer-'vice that has the ſanction of the legiſlature 'and the apparent approbation of our ſpiri-'tual and learned guides; we ſuppoſe it to be 'the beſt they can furniſh on the ſubject of 'religious worſhip; the beſt is ſo bad, that 'we may almoſt as well not worſhip at all.' Others perhaps may not reaſon in this manner, and may have a faint conception that a better form might be obtained; but they cannot tell how; and to deſert the church

appears to them a leſs evil than to aſſemble in oppoſition to it, with a ſervice ever ſo much to their taſte. You might, therefore, almoſt as well ſay, that if people do not like the laws, they may make better for themſelves, as that if they do not like the litturgy they muſt procure a better: they in general conceive themſelves to have as much power and right to do the one as the other.

WHIG.

I fancy they cannot, as they ſee the diſſenters practiſing with impunity a method of worſhip very different from that of the church.

PHILOSOPHER.

I believe in general they have a notion of crime in diſſenting. If not, the faſhion would keep them nominally in the church.

CLERGYMAN.

You ſeem to me to make the people ridiculous and important at the ſame time.

PHILOSOPHER.

That is not my intention. I aſcribe the general diſregard to public worſhip, in a

great meaſure, to the imperfections in the public ſervice. You may ſay that the people are to blame in ſuffering ſuch reaſons to have ſuch a conſequence: they are ſo. You may think that the beſt form would not have preſerved the religion of ſuch a people. I believe it would. While a man is not actually vicious, and is deliberating on the part he is to chuſe, it is eaſy not only to keep him from vice but to lead him to goodneſs. The ſame people who are now irreligious and prophane, might have been religious and decent, if it had been the object of the legiſlature not only to preſerve the public worſhip above contempt, but to improve it into a rational and ſublime entertainment.

CLERGYMAN.

I cannot help admitting the truth of many things you ſay; and yet I think you wrong in attributing the decline of religion ſo much to the inattention of our governors about the improvement of the public ſervice. The diſſenters you ſee are in the ſame ſituation.

PHILOSOPHER.

Yes; and from a ſimilar cauſe: for they are but little more improved in their worſhip than you are.

WHIG.

Then I muſt think they have been miſrepreſented in the accounts we have of their former conventicles. I have been at ſeveral of their meeting-houſes, and found their preachers decent and ſenſible.

COURTIER.

Whenever my curioſity led me into thoſe places, I found them very ridiculous or very dull. And if I was obliged to attend them, I would prefer the man who made me laugh, to the man who made me ſleep.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

I thought, Sir, people did not go to places of worſhip to laugh or to ſleep.

COURTIER.

To be ſure they do not. I only meant, that of two evils I would chuſe the leaſt.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

You treat things of this kind in too ludicrous a manner.

PHILOSOPHER.

Well, well; we will have no offence given or taken. My friend's manner perhaps is not the beſt: but what ſay you to the objection he has made to your worſhip, that in general it is either dull or ridiculous.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

It may appear ſo to perſons not religiouſly diſpoſed.

PHILOSOPHER.

Nay, that is ſaying nothing to the purpoſe. One of the ends of public worſhip is to make men religious; and if that end be not anſwered, the fault is not always in the man, but very often in the manner of conducting the worſhip. I have therefore thought the decline of your intereſt, as well as that ſhare of public virtue over which you have an influence, to be as much owing to the errors and ill-conduct of your miniſters, elders and truſtees, as the ſame evils, in

their

their proportion, are owing to the ſame faults in the governors and miniſters of the church.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

This charge would appear new and aſtoniſhing to our people, as it really does to me.

PHILOSOPHER.

To what do you aſcribe the decline of your religion and intereſt?

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

To the increaſing profligacy of the times.

PHILOSOPHER.

To what is that profligacy owing?

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

To a variety of cauſes?

PHILOSOPHER.

Among which, is the cauſe I am now animadverting upon. I ſee, Sir, that you are willing to excuſe your order. The ſpirit of prieſthood has ſome influence on almoſt every miniſter. In all denominations, you are formed into a body, and you have ſomething like the ſympathy of members. I

would therefore wiſh to avoid any incivility to you by ſpeaking harſhly of the failings of your body.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

I ſhould be ſorry to prevent your ſaying whatever you think; and I aſſure you I am far from being diſpoſed to be offended.

PHILOSOPHER.

Religion is equal to all the ends for which it was intended. I ſuppoſe no one will diſpute this. Public worſhip, an inſtitution of religion, has one ſimple end in view, public devotion; to which it is equal, if conducted upon the genuine principles of religion, and with a judicious regard to the ſtate of human nature. This end was fully anſwered by the public ſervice of the church of England at the reformation; becauſe it was conceived by the people to be agreeable to ſcripture; and in ſpirit, language, rites and ceremonies was adapted to the principles and manners of the age.

WHIG.

Why ſhould not the ſame end be anſwered now in all thoſe who heartily approve of the ſervice; and they are a great majority of the people who go to church?

PHILOSOPHER.

That I do not believe. That the majority of thoſe who go to church know nothing of the truth or falſehood of the principles they worſhip upon, I will readily allow. But they have generally adopted a notion that things are not as they ſhould be. Thoſe of their acquaintance who have the reputation of wiſdom and learning, have been known to ſpeak againſt the ſervice; and are ſeen to neglect it. This has the ſame effect upon the people, at leaſt in kind, as their own diſbelief would have. If you conſider this as an anſwer, I will reſume my diſcourſe. I was going to ſay, that when the Puritans were formed into congregations, they would have had the ſame devotion among them, if they had uſed the liturgy (to almoſt all of which, they had no objection) without

copes, ſurplices, or any babyloniſh trappings. But with greater boldneſs and real policy, than peaceableneſs and piety, they threw off the liturgy: ſtripped to their very coats; and became apparently apoſtolic. In cold weather, I am told, they made John Calvin their patron, and wore a Geneva cloak.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

You may laugh if you pleaſe at little things which cannot affect the principles on which we act: but, if the diſſenters changed a manner of worſhip uſed by fallible men, for that which was uſed by men who were not fallible; they did right, and what was their duty.

PHILOSOPHER.

I never heard that the apoſtles inſtituted a manner of worſhip. I ſuppoſe they obſerved no fixed one. They ſeem to have gone from place to place; to have had private meetings, where in all probability they prayed, not ſo much for the preſervation and improvement of known and eſtabliſhed principles

ples and diſpoſitions, as for extraordinary graces and the ſucceſs of a new religion. Their prayers were therefore various, according to the extraordinary gifts which were wanted; and their principal end was not ſo much ſocial devotion, as to obtain ſuch helps as ſome particular circumſtances required. They aſſert, very plainly, that in theſe applications they were under the immediate direction of the ſpirit of God; and we may ſuppoſe, in their circumſtances, they applied principally if not entirely for what was neceſſary for the good of the church. Their prayers therefore as well as preaching were ſuited to the circumſtances of a people under the direction of the Holy Ghoſt, and endeavouring to change the religion of mankind; but could not be deſigned as models to the future miniſters of that religion, when they ſhould have no pretenſions to the directions of the ſpirit; and their buſineſs would be, not to procure of heaven any extraordinary gifts and favors for men; but to preſerve on their minds the influence of known

principles;

principles; and to diſpoſe them to the practice of the acknowledged duties of an eſtabliſhed religion.—But I muſt return. The puritan preachers, when they ſeparated from the church, aſſumed as much as poſſible, the characters of apoſtles; they pretended to have the ſame aſſiſtance from the ſpirit; and I believe to all their powers, except thoſe of ſpeaking in all languages, and working miracles. The eſtabliſhed religion was to them, as heatheniſm had been to the apoſtles; and puritaniſm was the kingdom and church of Chriſt to be introduced on its ruins. Their people believed in the validity of theſe pretenſions, and the godlineſs of their views. The beſt method, therefore, they could purſue, was that of the apoſtles; for the people thought their circumſtances ſimilar. The puritan manner of worſhip was therefore well ſuited to the circumſtances and views of the diſſenting miniſters and people of thoſe times. The methodiſts are now in the ſame circumſtances, uſe the ſame means, and have the ſame ſucceſs. The world, according

cording to them, is all in darkneſs; and their field-preachers are immediately in the hands of the Holy Ghoſt to give it new light and information. While the miniſters among the preſbyterians apprehended they were thus favored, they were right in continuing the apoſtolic manner of praying and preaching; and while the people believed them, they did it with effect. But when they dropped their pretenſions, as the moſt reputable of them have long done, they ſhould have provided againſt the conſequences. A flaſhy, furious rhapſody engaged the hearts of a people who could believe it to be the fervor of inſpiration; but when that belief was loſt, almoſt all the influence of their prayers was loſt; and if they had not improved their ſermons, the moſt rational of them would have been deſerted.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

You ſeem now to be got into a paradox!

COURTIER.

Ay; he dearly loves paradoxes; and you will find them d—d vexatious things.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

I do not underſtand, why a man's dropping pretenſions, which he could not ſupport, ſhould be a reaſon for loſing his influence, without throwing the blame on the people, and not on him.

PHILOSOPHER.

A man is to be commended if, from a principle of integrity, he relinquiſhes claims which he has no right to make; and does it as publickly as the nature of the thing requires. I think your miniſters have not acted in this manner. A few bold ones have given hints of this kind in print; but their books are not much read, and their credit is not conſiderable among the people; a great part of whom, I believe, ſtill retain an opinion, that you are aſſiſted in your prayers by the Holy Ghoſt. You continue a practice which favours ſuch an opinion; which, though a falſe one, you find not unfriendly to your perſonal importance. But this is one of the means by which you ruin your intereſt. For not having the belief of inſpiration your-

ſelves,

ſelves, you partly compoſe your prayers, and check that fire which uſed to warm your devotees; and you turn your rational people into meer hearers of a ſpecies of declamation, generally languid and unaffecting, upon the eſtabliſhed principles of morality.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

Our prayers are very different from declamations; they are immediate applications to the Deity, for the common bleſſings of his providence and grace.

PHILOSOPHER.

Do your miniſters, or many of your people, think that you receive thoſe bleſſings in conſequence of your applications?

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

We are enjoined in ſcripture to make them.

PHILOSOPHER.

That I know; and I know that men have ever made thoſe applications; the ſimple and ignorant, under a notion that they were to obtain what they aſked, as one man obtains a favour of another; the more enlightened and philoſophical, under a notion that God acted

acted in all things by the unchangeable rules of goodneſs; and that prayers were extremely uſeful, as they preſerved on the mind a ſtrong ſenſe of dependance on him.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

Do you look upon prayer to have no further uſe?

PHILOSOPHER.

I cannot pretend to judge of all the reaſons of many commands of ſcripture, nor of all the uſes of many of the dictates of nature. We muſt ſuppoſe that God acts by invariable laws; and yet nature and revelation have inſtructed us to pray to him as if he was ſuch a one as ourſelves. It is not my buſineſs now to reconcile theſe apparent inconſiſtencies. I am to attend the progreſs of human improvements, and to point out the errors of thoſe who do not adapt their inſtitutions and manners, to the ſeveral ſteps of that progreſs. However, I will juſt obſerve, that the firſt prayers of men, were certainly on the principle of Anthropomorphiſm. They conceived of God as in human ſhape, with human

paſſions and human wants. They firſt of all dropped his wants; they are now relinquiſhing his paſſions; and it is poſſible the time may come, when they ſhall not conceive of him as a perſon, in any ſhape whatever. As people corrected their apprehenſions of God, they altered their methods of ſerving him. Chriſtianity, by improving theſe apprehenſions, has greatly improved our devotion; and if we made that progreſs which in every thing we are formed for making, we ſhould arrive at degrees more and more exalted; ſtill aiming at that purity and perfection, which we ſhall never attain, becauſe we ſhall never comprehend God. Such are our preſent imperfections, at leaſt, ſuch are my own, that I can but ſeldom conceive of the Deity, otherwiſe than as a perſon, analogous to a human being, with perfections as much more excellent as I can poſſibly imagine. When I endeavour to change my conception, it ſometimes dwindles into a point, ſometimes is diſſipated into infinite ſpace. I can ſeldom conceive of the divine attributes

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as inherent in a ſubſtance, without giving it a form. When I think of his works and his providence, they are the works and providence of this being of my imagination. When I acknowledge and adore the effects of his goodneſs, wiſdom and power, I refer them to this being: When I am happy, my heart directs me to praiſe *him:* when I am miſerable, I implore *his* compaſſion: when I want any thing which I know not how to procure, I direct my hopes to *his* goodneſs; and when I obtain it, in the common courſe of things, I acknowledge that goodneſs as ſincerely, as if I had been favoured by an extraordinary interpoſition. This, I am afraid, is the beſt account I can give of my devotion. I think people in general are not got beyond me in this matter; till they are, and they have acquired a knowledge of God which they have not yet poſſeſſed, I am very ſure that the preſent principles of piety, and the preſent method of cheriſhing them ſhould be continued, improved upon, and rendered as effectual as poſſible.

CLERGYMAN.

There are ſeveral methods now in uſe; do you mean to put them all on a footing?

PHILOSOPHER.

I meant, in general, to recommend the utility of praying to and praiſing the Almighty.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

But I ſhould conclude, from your ſentiments of devotion, that free prayer would be moſt likely to anſwer your purpoſes.

PHILOSOPHER.

Why?

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

Becauſe it admits of applications in all particular caſes; and it improves, of courſe, as men improve in the knowledge of God.

PHILOSOPHER.

I do not ſee that free prayer has the advantage in the ſingle point of variety, over a form, to which the miniſter might add collects on any neceſſary occaſions; becauſe, through forgetfulneſs, or a want of readineſs in forming new petitions, your miniſters omit many things which they would be glad

to take notice of. Beſides, public prayer ſhould not deſcend into particulars too minute, it takes off from our reverence, and deſtroys our devotion. That the extemporary prayers of people will improve with their improvements, is very true: but this is not with me a ſufficient reaſon for giving them the preference to a liturgy; becauſe the latter is in itſelf, better ſuited to the purpoſes of public worſhip; it may be better compoſed than the ſervices of any ſingle man, and its improvements may be proportionably greater.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

But the fact is againſt you. The Engliſh liturgy might be a better ſervice than the prayers of the firſt puritans; but you will not ſay, it is better than thoſe of the modern diſſenters: It has admitted of no improvements at all.

PHILOSOPHER.

That is no objection to a liturgy. You ſhould ſeparate the thing from the circumſtance under which it has lain. If it had been improved as it ought, it would have been

been ſuperior to the prayers of the modern diſſenters, as it was formerly to thoſe of the puritans. Nay, with all its imperfections, it is now ſuperior to moſt, if not all of them; that is, it ſerves to excite the devotion of the people better than the prayers of the modern diſſenters. I repeat to you, that when a conſiderable part of your people have loſt the opinion of your inſpiration; when do you not rant at dignities; tell the Deity the ſtate of political parties, and the people the news of the day; when you are not thought to have more intereſt with heaven than other men, and are only appointed to expreſs the allowed ſentiments of the congregation on the plaineſt points of religion,—not one in a hundred of you, can keep up the attention, and engage the affections of your congregations without a form. It is a fact that you do not. I never attend your meeting-houſes, without being offended at the inattention of your people, till the prayers are over, and they hope to hear ſomething new in the ſermon. When a ſtranger offici-

ates, his prayers, like his ſermons, are ſometimes ſubjects of curioſity and critical attention; they are admired for their excellence, or diſapproved for their want of merit in the ſame manner that ſermons are; and they are ſeldom conſidered and mentioned as means of public devotion.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

We are certainly entitled to credit in our pretenſions as well as other people. We find our devotion is excited and preſerved by free prayer; and we join in the ſeveral parts with the readieſt aſſent, and with great advantage.

PHILOSOPHER.

I do not diſpute your credit, or the ſincerity of your pretenſions; but I cannot help thinking, however, that if your method was well calculated for the purpoſes of devotion, it would have ſucceeded in the hands of ſo many able men as you have had; and your numbers, inſtead of decreaſing, would have increaſed; eſpecially, as the ſervice of the church is ſo imperfect, and ſo diſagreeable

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to the principles and taſte of the greater part of the people.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

It has ſucceeded in the hands of many of our miniſters; particularly in thoſe of the late Dr. Foſter. There are many now living who will declare, they never attended public worſhip with equal pleaſure, as when he conducted it; nor have ever ſeen greater marks of public devotion.

PHILOSOPHER.

I fancy you will not find among thoſe, any one who conſtantly attended his miniſtry. I am well informed that it was the complaint of thoſe who did; that he varied ſo little in his prayers, that the firſt effects of them were loſt, in a great meaſure, on thoſe who were his conſtant hearers. At his lecture, or on his journeys, where his audiences were, for the moſt part, perſons who had never, or but ſeldom heard him; a well-compoſed form as his was; committed to memory; and pronounced with the peculiar advantages of his voice and manner, muſt have had a great effect. But you ſee this caſe is not at all to your

purpoſe. I therefore repeat my opinion, that your method is not well calculated for the purpoſes of devotion. When I have attended any of you, and have been pleaſed with the compoſition and piety of a good prayer; I cannot ſay that I felt in myſelf, or could obſerve in others, any ſymptoms of a ſocial devotion. My feeling was generally that of admiration; ſometimes that of private devotion. I could perceive a ſenſible difference between giving my heartieſt aſſent to what you ſay, and the pleaſure I had of offering up, as my own, and in union with others, the unexceptionable parts of the public ſervice. I never, in your places, could well conceive myſelf as one of a multitude of my fellow-creatures, joining in a common action, and expreſſing, as from one heart, the nobleſt and moſt affecting ſentiments. I am apt to think, ſir, if you were a hearer, you would be of my opinion. Miniſters cannot eaſily change places with their people. You have a pleaſure in expreſſing your own conceptions, which you cannot fully communicate

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to them; when a new thought occurs to you, and you form an unuſual ſentiment of the divine character, it may delight you; it may appear odd to them; they will certainly not have the pleaſure you have. When you plead, therefore, for free prayers, you conſider only yourſelves; for you only are free in them; you attend to the pleaſures you feel, and ſome of you perhaps to the importance you are of, when you ſpeak in your own words, and not in thoſe of another. You forget that while you may be delighted, your poor people may be inattentive, looking about them for ſomething to employ their thoughts, and wiſhing now and then you were come to the end of your ſervice.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

The force of your objection ſeems to lie againſt our prayers, as not being immediately offered up by the people; you ſay that therefore our congregations do not pray. Do thoſe of the eſtabliſhment pray any more than the diſſenters, except in the reſponſes, which are only a ſmall part of the ſervice?

PHILOSOPHER.

They certainly do. The ſervice is before them; by following the miniſter, they make every act of worſhip their own; which to my apprehenſion, is very different from giving the heartieſt and readieſt aſſent to prayers delivered without book.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

Will you ſay, that pious affections may not be excited by an extempore prayer, well expreſſed, and properly delivered? If this be denied, it muſt be denied at the ſame time that the power of oratory is any thing; that a ſpeech in the houſe of commons, or at the bar, never communicated to the audience the ſentiments and affections intended to be communicated by the ſpeaker; or that Mr. Garrick's power over you, depends upon your being perfect before-hand in the parts which he is to act.

PHILOSOPHER.

I never meant to ſay that pious affections may not be *excited* by extempore prayers; but that to have them excited by a miniſter, and

to expreſs them ourſelves in conjunction with a congregation, are very different things. If this diſtinction were to appear of no great importance in itſelf, it would be otherwiſe, when it was conſidered that there are but few in any age, that can excite thoſe affections in the common ſervices of their whole lives, by free prayers; and that every congregation may expreſs and exerciſe its devout affections for ever, in the uſe of a well compoſed liturgy. You ſee then I do not deny the power of oratory; I acknowledge it in the fulleſt manner; I acknowledge it in the influence of a good extempore prayer, under the advantages of novelty and a good delivery: but I maintain it is different from the effect of joining an aſſembly in an act of public worſhip: in the one caſe I am acted upon; in the other I act for myſelf. Mr. Garrick's powers I have felt in the higheſt degree; and the more for not knowing the part he was to act. But I did not make his ſentiments my own; I very often entirely deteſted them. Or perhaps he raiſed in me, pity, terror, love, when I could ſee

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he felt himself none of those passions; he was distressed, or brave, or virtuous. Even in expressions of devotion, which I have seen in the highest perfection on the stage, I felt the powers of the actor, and the truth of the sentiments, exactly as I should those of a dissenting minister who had the same advantages:—this assent is certainly a kind of worship, but it is inferior greatly to that, in which we actually bear a part. If this be true, of free-prayer, under all its advantages; what shall we say of the state of public worship among you, when, to say the least, the ministers in general must be incapable of conducting it, so as to give it the effect it ought to have? Those who are not loose, desultory, and indecent, are confined to one or more forms, which they have committed to memory, which they repeat as a school-boy does his lesson; and in that constrained manner, and unnatural tone, which they acquired under the difficulty of learning them. In short, gentlemen, between the incoherences and improprieties of the liturgy, and the languid unaffect-

unaffecting or ridiculous prayers of the diſſenters, real devotion is almoſt baniſhed the land, and the principles and manners of the people are profligate to the higheſt degree. I do not mean that theſe are the only cauſes of our corruption, but they are very important and very ſhameful ones.

CLERGYMAN.

Admitting theſe to have ſome influence of the kind you mention; what, in your opinion, can be done to remove them?

PHILOSOPHER.

Remove their cauſes.

CLERGYMAN.

Who can remove them?

PHILOSOPHER.

A wiſe and good legiſlature; whenever we are happy enough to have one. Attempts of this kind have been made by individuals, but with no other ſucceſs than that of opening the eyes of the people to ſee an unhappineſs which they could not get rid of.

WHIG.

But ſuppoſe the parliament, this winter, was to turn out to be the wiſe and good one we want, what meaſures would you wiſh to ſee purſued for the advantage of religion? Our friend here may report your hints to ſome of the pious people in adminiſtration; they will be glad to improve upon them, and to aſſiſt in carrying them into execution.

COURTIER.

I hope you will prepare Wilkes to act his part on the occaſion.

PHILOSOPHER.

Then you are diſpoſed to laugh off the ſubject?

WHIG.

No, really. When you mentioned a wiſe and good legiſlature, I could not help thinking of the figure which the preſent would make in ſuch a caſe; and I know not how, my imagination took a ludicrous, not an indignant turn.

PHILOSOPHER.

Every thing is eaſy to a wiſe and good government. But as I have all along profeſſed to keep clear of the land of viſion, I will point out what I think may be done, as things ſtand at preſent. Many of the improvements of our conſtitution in church as well as ſtate have come to paſs by ſuffering canons, ſtatutes and cuſtoms to become obſolete and out of uſe. In this manner, we avoid the conſequences of error and precipitancy in authoritatively ſetting them aſide; we become perfect judges of their influence and value by having ſeen them in and out of uſe; and we may reſume or abrogate them with almoſt a certainty of public good. We avoid too the miſchiefs of diſcontent and ſedition frequently attending the beſt alterations if ſuddenly made. On the other hand, we leave a power and a temptation to do evil in the hands of any bad adminiſtration. I believe however that we now ſtand a better chance of having a liberal and beneficial eſtabliſhment than if we had formerly

merly given way to any attempts ſuddenly and entirely to reform us. Every one of thoſe attempts, however, had its uſe. They have given us ſomething like an eſtimate of the numbers and ſtrength of the diſcontented; they have probably increaſed that number; every one having generally ſuggeſted a new reaſon for its meaſures. I could wiſh to ſee them continued; and ſome other meaſures taken to engage the attention of the legiſlature. There are reaſons to ſuppoſe, that great numbers of the clergy are very uneaſy under the preſent laws and with the preſent ſervice of the church. As men of learning, abilities and piety, they can never employ themſelves better than in ſketching out theſe improvements in the hierarchy and ſervice which they think moſt reaſonable and expedient. Every man ſhould ſend theſe fruits of his attention and ſtudy to his dioceſan. It would be a likely means of diffuſing a concern for public worſhip, which ſeems almoſt loſt. No men can be ſuppoſed to underſtand the convenience or inconvenience of

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eccleſiaſtical conſtitutions, and the efficacy or inefficacy of the religious ſervice, ſo well as attentive and liberal clergymen. I wonder they have remained ſo inactive, and that we have not had in much greater numbers, eccleſiaſtical regulations and ſpecimens of liturgies for the improvement and proſperity of the church.

COURTIER.

I thought you had known more of mankind than to hope the clergy would reform the church.

PHILOSOPHER.

I am not for leaving the work entirely to the clergy. I would have the laity as induſtrious in this matter as the clergy; and I ſhould be glad to hear that mixed companies ſuch as ours frequently turned their converſation on the ſame ſubjects. We are not all clergy; and yet I doubt not but we ſhould agree tolerably in our attempts to reform abuſes, and to reſtore the credit of the church.

WHIG.

We ſhould be aſſiſted in any ſteps we choſe to take, by knowing more particularly what you would wiſh to ſee done.

PHILOSOPHER.

I have hinted to you almoſt every thing I would wiſh to ſee done.—It is my ſincere opinion, that the preſent form of the church would not be intirely changed even for an apoſtolic one without great public injury; at leaſt without great diſturbance and danger. If it could be done, it would not be deſirable, becauſe it would not agree and ſuit with the other parts of the conſtitution. I ſhould therefore be for continuing the government of it by arch-biſhops, biſhops, &c. in the preſent form, to avoid innovation, and to furniſh exerciſe for that ſenſe of honor and that ambition which are ſo uſeful in ſuch a ſtate as ours; ſome regulations being made with regard to reſidence, pluralities, and livings in commendam. But I ſhould wiſh to ſee all thoſe canons and laws which are become obſolete through the public ſenſe of their inexpediency,

expediency, entirely repealed, and ſpiritual courts confined in their cognizance to the manners of ſpiritual men. I do not mean that, even in the caſes of clergymen, they ſhould interfere with the civil magiſtrate in adjudging of civil right and wrong; but that the outward religion and general manners of the clergy and their immediate dependants ſhould be liable to information and cenſure in thoſe courts; an appeal lying to the common-law or to a court of equity under any apprehenſions of unfair proceedings.

As for creeds, articles, and ſubſcriptions, there ought to be none; for they can be of no ſervice; and we know they may be of diſſervice.

CLERGYMAN.

What; would you not require ſubſcription to the ſcriptures?

PHILOSOPHER.

No: becauſe I cannot ſee, it would be of any uſe, and it might do harm. A man who is educated for the miniſtry, and pro-

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feſſes himſelf a chriſtian by almoſt every action of his life, need not be put to ſwear that he is one; and a man who does not afford this preſumption by his life, ſhould not be admitted as a miniſter.

CLERGYMAN.

You open a way for Deiſts and Atheiſts.

PHILOSOPHER.

Only for thoſe of them who are rogues; who would readily ſubſcribe to any thing you could put before them. But if the alteration I propoſe would be thought too great, let the ſubſcription be required only to chriſtianity. The candidate, however, ſhould not be admitted without ſufficient proofs of his learning, general ſobriety and good behavior. In this manner I could wiſh to ſee proviſion made for an honorable and uſeful clergy. By their means, and by the aſſiſtance of all other ingenious and religious men, I ſhould hope to ſee a liturgy which every rational chriſtian of every opinion could join in with devotion and pleaſure. The plan of it ſhould be as general as poſſible; that

that all good men, at the ſame time that they enquired with perfect freedom, and differed from each other on difficult and intricate ſubjects, might bring together their affections and join their hearts in ſocial devotion. —The objection to making it ſo general is, that every party who did not find it formed on its own particular ſentiments, would ſay, that the moſt important points of religion were neglected. Any man who will diſſent for this reaſon, I will venture to ſay, that he ſeldom or never felt the power of ſocial devotion: I am apt to think, he cannot know what it is. Can a man be ſaid to worſhip God, who in his prayers ſeems to inſtruct him in, or to inform him of his ſyſtematical principles? Can he be ſaid to know what ſocial devotion is, when he wiſhes to bring things into it, foreign to its nature, and in order to avoid joining, with a fellow-chriſtian who diſlikes them, in a duty which would open his heart to the higheſt pleaſures? Is this the way of preparing for heaven, where it is very poſſible that there will

be a variety of knowledge and ſentiments; but where Athanaſians, Arians, Socinians will all join in one form of worſhip?—Public devotion has nothing to do with the ſentiments which diſtinguiſh particular ſects and parties; nothing diſputable can be introduced into it without impropriety as well as miſchief; and thoſe who compoſe their prayers upon the principles of any ſyſtem, are deſtitute of devotion as well as judgment and taſte.

COURTIER.

I believe I ſhould go to church, if I had ſuch a liturgy as you propoſe to have.

PHILOSOPHER.

So would almoſt every man. I ſhould think this muſt have occurred to thouſands in this country; and how they can ſit ſtill and ſee the churches gradually deſerted, and not endeavor to remove the cauſe, is to me aſtoniſhing! They complain of it as a ſign of depravity, when they muſt know, it is as much a conſequence of the increaſe of knowledge. They ſay the taſte for plays,

operas,

operas, &c. divert the attention of the people from every thing that is good. I wonder they do not aſk themſelves the queſtion, What can a ſenſible and improved people find to engage them at plays? I think they would be obliged to own, it is a rational and moral entertainment. Is it not a ſhame to the friends of religion, that they ſhould not find their account much better at church? Is it becauſe the eccleſiaſtical revenues in any places are inferior to the profits of a play-houſe, that ſo little attention is paid to improvements in the one, while ſo much is in the other? Are the ſubjects of entertainment of greater variety or greater importance, more intereſting, more affecting in the latter than in the former? Every thing gives pleaſure according to its excellence. This is a general truth; though not to be applied to every particular inſtance of human conduct. No man prefers the leſſer to the greater, or the bad to the good, but when things are not ſet before him to equal advantage, and he is impoſed upon. Men

in general would not prefer a play-houſe to a church, but that in the former the performance is ſuited to the deſign of his attendance, and in the latter it is not. I have never attended at an Oratorio of Mr. Handel's without having theſe thoughts on the ſubject of public worſhip. I have ſeen every face perfectly ſerious; and I would have ventured my life that almoſt every heart was under the influence of a real though a very tranſient devotion. I have ſeen at one time pious ſorrow draw tears; at another, I have ſeen joy ſpread a chearfulneſs through the houſe. "What, I have ſaid to myſelf, would be the effect of ſuch an entertainment in the real ſervice of religion; the place a church; the perſons officiating and performing known to be religious and moral; and their views the improvement and pleaſure of the human heart!" Depend upon it, the great reaſon, that the play-houſe is attended, and the church forſaken, is this;—the proprietors of the one have made it their buſineſs to improve their entertainments

tainments as the taſte of men has improved; the ſervice of the church continues as it was two hundred years ago. If the latter had been left as open to improvements as the former, and had given the ſame encouragement to genius, in proportion to its wealth, there would have been no play-houſe which could have rivalled the church; and religion would have been the pleaſure as well as intereſt of the people. Inſtead of that, it is a burden; or a ſubject of ridicule. Many of our people of faſhion never go to church, the ſervice does not engage their attention or excite their devotion. Our gentry and our merchants make Sunday a day of the loweſt and moſt trifling recreation. Young people in general deſert the church; and the few good impreſſions they receive are at the play-houſe. Hence, in a great meaſure, the profligacy of that time of life; and the melancholy proſpect it gives of the future ſtate of things.

WHIG.

Come; I think you are too ſevere; eſpecially on young people.

PHILOSOPHER.

Too ſevere, did you ſay? If I had ſaid young *men*, I ſhould have been much too mild. I believe human nature never exhibited the degree of profligacy which may be juſtly charged on this age.

COURTIER.

In which I think the ladies bear a capital part.

PHILOSOPHER.

I am not of that opinion. They are profligate to a degree that is aſtoniſhing compared to the manners of former times; but they are only copying and at a diſtance what has been long ſet before them by the men. I am not vindicating their conduct. I think it infamous, and likely to be attended with ſhocking conſequences. But I attribute the ill-conduct of women to the ill-conduct of men.

COURTIER.

Are there not women openly abandoned? Do they not invite and ſollicit men to wickedneſs?

PHILOSOPHER.

Every woman is made abandoned by a man. There may be ſome exceptions; but they are ſo few, that I dare ſay, Sir, you never heard of one. The unhappy wretches you hint at, abandon virtue, not from choice, but from deſpair. Can you think that any woman would chuſe a life of debauchery, or can enter on it with views of pleaſure and advantage? The condition of a Negro in our plantations is happy compared with that of a ſtreet-walker in London. She is the inſtrument of profit to an infernal bawd; or of what is called pleaſure to young men void of taſte, moral principles, and religion.—But it is in vain to talk on this ſubject when the faſhion is againſt us. The legiſlature has diſcouraged marriage, the only remedy in this caſe; and, as I have already ſaid, we have but little aſſiſtance from religion.

gion.—A young man cannot marry till he is one and twenty without the conſent of his parents or guardians. This law has anſwered the end propoſed by thoſe who firſt formed it, in deterring ſome heirs of great eſtates from marrying beneath them: it has done more, it has rendered moſt young men indiſpoſed to marry at all. The politic father connives at the irregularities of youth; among which is deceiving and ruining an innocent girl: the harm is only a little expence; perhaps breaking the hearts of her parents, and driving her on the town:—all is well if the boy does not marry beneath him. Even the tradeſman glories in the influence which he has to prevent the marriage of his ſon till it is convenient. The ſpruce young man may do acts of deceit and villainy in his commerce with women; may ſpend his money; and ruin his conſtitution, ſo long as he does not marry till ſome event takes place which is to make him rich or great; though he can never be otherwiſe than contemptible and wretched. In ſhort, almoſt all morality,

and

and therefore, almoſt all happineſs is loſt in the commerce of the ſexes. The diſhoneſty and treachery of the ſeducer ought to be felony, if he refuſes ample ſatisfaction. The other evils would be remedied by a law oppoſite in its tendency to the marriage-act; giving a child the power of marrying at any time with or without conſent; and obliging the parent to make a certain allowance for his ſupport. They would be entirely removed, if by any means the credit and influence of religion were reſtored; if its ſervices were ſuch as might be joined in by the moſt ſenſible; ſuch as would engage the thoughtleſs; and afford entertainment and advantage to all the people.

CLERGYMAN.

I muſt confeſs that there is ſomething very flattering, as well as probable in what you ſay of an improved and well-conducted worſhip. But your plan I fear will not ſuit the taſte of many of our governors.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

It is on too wide a ſcale; and would leſſen their

their power of admitting or excluding candidates for preferment.

WHIG.

Pray, what is to be done with the diſſenters in ſuch a church as you would have?

PHILOSOPHER.

It is impoſſible on my plan that the church ſhould perſecute, or require ſubſcriptions from thoſe who ſeparate from her. When the views of men are to do good, they never injure others who purſue the ſame end, by different means. An eſtabliſhed church, upon the principles of real religion and open to improvements, need not fear any competition. Perſecution ariſes from a dread of being detected in error, or of being excelled. There would be no ſuch dread in the caſe I am ſuppoſing; and the conſequence would be an unlimited and unconditional toleration.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

Does not this contradict what you have ſaid, when you placed religion under the direction of the magiſtrate; and ſeemed to think

think thoſe criminal, in a political ſenſe, who departed from the eſtabliſhed church?

PHILOSOPHER.

I ſhould have thought that you muſt have ſeen, that I never meant that the magiſtrate ſhould take up religion as a property, and direct and controul all men in the uſe of it. I meant that he ſhould blend the intereſts of it with thoſe of a civil kind as much as poſſible. A mode of worſhip ſhould be eſtabliſhed, to which certain advantages ſhould be annexed:—It does not follow that thoſe who chuſe to forego ſuch advantages, ſhould be liable to puniſhment. The diſſenters ſhould be puniſhed only when they bite and devour one another; or when they commit any offences of a civil nature.

CLERGYMAN.

But an unlimited toleration would not be conſiſtent with the ſafety of the ſtate.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

A toleration of papiſts would have the worſt conſequences.

PHILOSOPHER.

Why of papiſts? Cannot you enjoy a bleſſing becauſe it is enjoyed by papiſts?

WHIG.

I cannot help thinking myſelf, that you go too far in wiſhing an unlimited toleration. There are many evils to be apprehended from removing the reſtraints upon popery.

PHILOSOPHER.

In all conteſts about different ſpecies of religion, the well-known words of Gamaliel would furniſh a good rule.

Jeſus Chriſt enjoins us to *love our enemies*, to *do good to thoſe who hate us*, and to *pray for thoſe who deſpitefully uſe and perſecute us*. Theſe are important principles of our religion; and any prudence or policy will not juſtify our deviation from them. Nay prudence or policy lie on their ſide, as they always do on thoſe of truth and reaſon. The only method of reconciling papiſts to government, is by lenity and good treatment. If they do any act of undutifulneſs, let the law puniſh them; but let them think as they may,

may, and worſhip as publickly as they pleaſe, no harm can ariſe from it, eſpecially when the public worſhip of the church is rendered as much better, more noble, and more affecting, as I propoſe it ſhould be. As for the apprehenſions you have expreſſed, they are not well grounded; they are unreaſonable. The timid will never be perſuaded to take many ſteps, which appear to a man of ſpirit ſure and proper: he is always ſurrounded with fears and ſuſpicions. There are ſo many things to be apprehended by all parties, that they will not meet each other, and give up immaterial diſtinctions. One man fears his ſyſtematical principles may loſe ground; another, that he may loſe his benefice; another, his popularity; another, the imaginary dignity of a ſeparate profeſſion. Theſe, and many other fears keep aſunder the various ſects of proteſtants, while they continue under the general profeſſion of candour, and the love of liberty: and popery has ſo many terrors to all of them, that it muſt by no means be tolerated. In conſidering the ſeve-

ral diviſions of the chriſtian world, it is perhaps difficult not to connect with their original denominations, the ideas of all their original principles. The church of England on the firſt riſe of parties, was diſtinguiſhed by its attachment to royal prerogative; the diſſenters were fond of the influence of the people, even to republicaniſm and democracy. Theſe things at that time were not queſtions of meerly ſpeculative diſquiſition; they had an influence on the public, and had a great ſhare in healing, or in forming anew ſome important parts of a confuſed and ſhattered conſtitution. We are not therefore to wonder, that the ſeveral parties were highly exaſperated againſt one another; or that their mutual animoſity ſhould not vaniſh immediately with the cauſes of it. The cruelties of popery have been of an aſtoniſhing kind; not to be equalled by any thing in the hiſtory of the whole world. It is therefore the leſs to be wondered at, that the deſcendants of thoſe who bore thoſe cruelties, ſhould be backward to favour the papiſts, and ſhould have

ſome

ſome difficulty in believing that popery, as others have in believing that high churchiſm, and preſbyterianiſm, having the names and principles they had in former times, ſhould not cheriſh the ſame temper, and be ready to fall into the ſame behaviour. It may be ſaid, while the principles of the papiſts remain, they are as much to be dreaded as ever. Individuals, of all parties, do often act upon their diſtinguiſhing principles: whole parties ſeldom do, but when they are united with, or ſupported by views of intereſt. The diſſenters held it as the moſt ſacred reaſon of their ſeparation, that Jeſus Chriſt alone, was king of the ſaints; and that they owed ſubjection only to him in matters of conſcience. This principle, purſued through all its conſequences, is ſubverſive of all government, and as dangerous as any of popery. The diſſenters retain their principle; but having been mildly treated, they have inſenſibly imbibed the prevailing ſpirit of moderation and duty; and they are as much to be depended upon for their loyalty, as any ſub-

jects in the kingdom. I have myſelf no doubt but the ſame treatment would have the ſame effect upon papiſts. While they were in power, and that power was in danger of being wreſted from them, they puniſhed with diabolical ſeverity. While they had any chance of ſucceeding in a conteſt for power, they dropped not the principles which they thought they would ſoon have occaſion to reduce to practice. But now they are ſufferers, their old principles may be in their ſyſtem, and in moments of diſtreſs they may wiſh to reduce them to practice: in general, from the mildneſs of our government, they forget them; they would entirely forget them if they were generouſly tolerated. This kind of reaſoning ſeems agreeable to that of the apoſtle, *If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirſt, give him drink; for by ſo doing thou ſhalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*

WHIG.

There can be no doubt then, but you would have the diſſenters tolerated?

PHILOSOPHER.

No doubt; and as they are in fact tolerated at this time, and not as they are in law. There are penal ſtatutes againſt them unrepealed; and the conditions of their toleration are ſuch, that if they were inſiſted upon, and the diſſenters would adhere to their principles, would bring upon them a ſevere perſecution. But theſe, like other parts of our political fabric, being found uſeleſs and inconvenient, are ſuffered to lie in ruins, and will never be raiſed again.

COURTIER.

The diſſenters, you know, have not been content with a toleration; they have endeavoured to get the teſt-act repealed, and have claimed a right to be on a footing with the people of the eſtabliſhment.

PHILOSOPHER.

It would certainly be a wiſe meaſure in government to remove the teſt, becauſe it might then avail itſelf of the ſervices of all its members, and becauſe the only method to put an

end to diviſions, is by a kind and equal treatment of all its ſubjects.

COURTIER.

If theſe people were admitted to places of truſt, they would be ever endeavouring to change the form of government, and occaſioning uneaſineſs and diſturbance.

PHILOSOPHER.

It would have a quite contrary effect. Their quarrel with government is owing to their ill-treatment from it, and their not having the honour and advantage of its appointments. All this would be removed by their admiſſion; their ill-humour would work off; they would be ſoothed by diſtinctions; they would have a nearer view of the conſtitution, and ſee the inexpediency and impracticability of exchanging it; they would loſe their republicaniſm; they would not long be diſſenters.

CLERGYMAN.

I really believe you are miſtaken; for in my converſations with the moſt intelligent among them, I have found they have in view

view the intereſt of a party; which they call the diſſenting intereſt, and to which they refer in all their meaſures.

PHILOSOPHER.

I have often heard ſome of them talk of that intereſt, but I never could have a clear apprehenſion of what they meant by it.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

I ſhould think there can be no difficulty in underſtanding what any party means by its intereſt.

PHILOSOPHER.

There is not, in general. You diſſent from the church becauſe it is corrupt; you wiſh for a reformation; and yet when ſome ſteps have been propoſed with that view, of a proper, liberal, and generous kind, this reaſon has been alledged againſt them, by almoſt all the party, that they were not conſiſtent with their intereſt: ſo that a thing may be friendly to religion, and unfriendly to the diſſenting intereſt.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

No, Sir. We do not ſet it in oppoſition to

religion; we endeavour to make it ſerve its purpoſes. But every party has ſomething like a principle of ſelf-preſervation; and in order to anſwer the end of its being formed, it muſt take care of itſelf.

PHILOSOPHER.

You make the beſt apology which I think can be made for that kind of attention which is obſervable among the diſſenters. But their diſſent is on account of corruptions and faults in the eſtabliſhment, and their principal buſineſs ſhould be to furniſh ſuch reaſons and examples as may induce the church to reform itſelf.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

That they have always endeavoured to do. Their worſhip is in the ſimple unadorned manner of the apoſtles, and they endeavour to render it as abſtracted and ſpiritual as poſſible.

PHILOSOPHER.

The worſhip of the methodiſts is more in the manner of the apoſtles, for it is unpre-

meditated,

meditated, and excites the paſſions. No ſeaſonable man, however, will pretend to ſay, that they furniſh a good example for a change in the church of England. Much leſs do the modern Preſbyterians. The abſtracted and ſpiritual worſhip which you talk of, as ſomething above the common feelings and affections of the human heart, is, like platonic love, a falſe refinement; a thing that has no exiſtence, and the greateſt pretenders to the one, as well as to the other, are either inſipid and unfeeling, or hypocrites who unbend in ſecret, in proportion to the unnatural reſtraint they impoſed on themſelves in public. I have known exceptions to theſe general obſervations. Some very worthy perſons have had a fooliſh notion of this abſtract worſhip. They attended the meeting; paſſed the hour of devotion with a content, little above indifference; and their worſhip, as it was not intereſting, left only a languor on their minds. I have really pitied them. They have an idea of enjoyment, not ſuited to human nature; and debar themſelves of

one within their reach; the moſt noble and the moſt pleaſing of which the mind is capable. If this contemplative and abſtract enjoyment could be obtained in a much higher degree than it generally is, it would be more of the nature of private than public devotion: a man might indulge his imagination better in ſolitude than in public, and under the direction of another.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

Is not public and private devotion of the ſame nature?

PHILOSOPHER.

Yes; ſo far as to have the ſame Being for their object; but they differ, as the one is free and unlimited, and the other reſtrained, but rendered equally if not more advantageous, from a greater employment of the ſocial affections. For this reaſon, forms of private devotion have appeared to me highly abſurd, where, even words are not neceſſary; and free prayer as abſurd in public worſhip, becauſe it can be free only to the miniſter, to whom the devotion is almoſt confined, and becauſe

becauſe it prevents the exerciſe of all ſocial worſhip.

WHIG.

I really thought, when you animadverted on the ſervices of the church, that you were inclined to favour the prayers of the diſſenters. Indeed, I ſuſpected that, like moſt philoſophers, you thought lightly of public worſhip.

PHILOSOPHER.

Perhaps, under heaven, there cannot be a greater happineſs than what ariſes from a public worſhip of the Supreme Being, unanimouſly and decently conducted by a multitude of rational creatures; but this like every other kind of happineſs, is ſeldom enjoyed in any tolerable degree of perfection. It is either loſt in the wilds of fanaticiſm, or frozen up by the coldneſs of inſenſibility and formality; and a man of good ſenſe and good taſte, in an age when philoſophy has made a vaſt progreſs, and every art has an elegance that is enchanting, muſt find it difficult to join in any public ſervice that is meerly unexceptionable. He will generally find it tainted with

principles

principles that are doubtful, if not pernicious, or conducted in a ſlovenly and diſguſtful manner. The diſſenters, whoſe worſhip we have juſt now been conſidering, did not improve upon the ſervice which they quitted. In the heat of conteſt and ſeparation, they were incapable of forming a rational plan; the ſpirit of oppoſition exaſperated by ill uſage degenerated into animoſity; and they took up the common maxim among contending parties, to be as unlike their opponents as poſſible. Hence all method, order, and decency were trampled upon as ceremonious, carnal, popiſh; and the diſſenting aſſemblies were principally under the influence of the ſtrongeſt lungs, the wildeſt imaginations, and ſometimes the moſt ſhocking fanaticiſm. When time, and the indulgence of government had cooled them down a little, they were led into a more temperate method of worſhip. But in proportion as good ſenſe gained ground, their public ſervices became languid; and the people who had been uſed to have their paſſions on fire, and their fancies

cies moſt extravagantly employed, were diſguſted with cold and methodical addreſſes; and the diſſenting intereſt, as it is called, gradually decreaſed. And as the ſame cauſes will continue to have the ſame effects, the number of diſſenters will certainly decreaſe, if their miniſters go on to improve as other learned men; and they adhere to that mode of worſhip which was fallen upon in the heat and animoſity of ſeparation; and was as becoming times of enthuſiaſm and extravagance, as it is unbecoming thoſe of moderation and good ſenſe. The eſtabliſhed church is ancient, and in many things nobly deſigned; but as any edifice of the ſame ſtanding would hardly be thought convenient or beautiful, when it had never been repaired or improved; ſo the conſtitution of the church, having been left almoſt untouched from its firſt formation, is now found inconvenient, and to ſome perſons rather dangerous. It, however, preſerves the *manner* of worſhip which has been moſt prevailing in the chriſtian church; and what is more important,

portant, the manner which is moſt agreeable to that ſocial and benevolent temper, ſo eſſential to the character of a man, and a chriſtian; nay, what to me is more important yet, the only manner, in my opinion, by which there can be any ſocial devotion.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER.

Now, I think, you are partial; and to a degree that is uncandid and uncharitable. The utmoſt I ever knew an advocate for the church aim at, was to prove the method it enjoined, preferable to ours, but not the only method of devotion.

PHILOSOPHER.

I ſay, the only method of *ſocial* devotion, and it is the only method I know that is practicable for religious aſſemblies in general. But, Sir, I do not claim infallibility. I ſpeak only my opinion, which I am ſenſible may be falſe. Perhaps, however, even you may not think ſo, when I have explained my meaning of the word devotion. It is a word commonly uſed, but not always underſtood; and the genuine pleaſures it gives, though

though daily ſought for, there is reaſon to ſuſpect they are ſeldom felt. By philoſophical and religious minds in private, ſome of them are enjoyed, but they are faint and ſmall in number, compared with thoſe we might enjoy in ſociety. We are ſo formed by a good God, that every joy is multiplied upon us, when we partake of it in conjunction with others; and what barely affects us alone, will throw us into raptures when we ſee a number of our fellow creatures in the ſame circumſtances, and hear them expreſs the ſame feelings.—Private devotion reſults immediately from a ſenſe which an individual has of his relation to the Deity. In contemplating his goodneſs, wiſdom, and power, he feels the ſtrongeſt ſentiments of love, gratitude, and reſignation, and has a pleaſure as real as any pleaſure of ſenſe, and of a much ſuperior kind. It is very eaſy from hence to ſee what a public and ſocial devotion muſt be. It ariſes from the ſame acts of the individual, in conjunction with others: he muſt be actually employed himſelf in contem-

plating the perfections of the Deity; he muſt imagine all about him employed in the ſame manner, or he can know nothing of ſocial devotion. Hardly any thing can appear to me plainer than this; and yet it is not generally ſeen. Thouſands of good people have felt the pleaſures of devotion in ſolitude; and yet, in public, have ſo forgotten themſelves, as to imagine, becauſe they enjoyed a private pleaſure of the ſame kind, that there was nothing ſuperior to be found in public worſhip. They have liſtened to that of their miniſters, and aſſented to what they ſaid; and piouſly wiſhed its accompliſhment. When the miniſters have been happy in their expreſſions, they have had a conſiderable pleaſure, but it aroſe from admiration, a different thing from devotion: they admired the fine things the miniſter ſaid to, and of the Deity; their imaginations, perhaps, were fired by his ſimiles and metaphors, and they felt a pleaſure which they have ſubſtituted, and which ſome of their miniſters have paſſed upon them for devotion. How any perſons can

poſſibly think there is no difference between attending to another while he is worſhipping, and worſhipping themſelves; between aſſenting to the truth of what another ſays, and uttering thier own ſentiments and thoughts, is almoſt unaccountable!—How would the devotion of an aſſembly be promoted by appointing one man to ſing pſalms for the whole; even ſuppoſing him inveſted with the character of a miniſter! It would require more than chriſtian charity to ſuppoſe, while the man was ſinging, and the people, ſome in one poſture, and ſome in another, juſt as their eaſe, or indolence required, that they felt any thing like ſocial devotion. If he ſung well, his execution would be admired, and he would ſtand a fair chance of dividing with his God, the honours of what he called the worſhip. It muſt be the ſame in prayers. The people ought all to be engaged; and appear to each other to be ſo: it is then only the religious principle is properly ſtrengthened by the ſocial; every perſon concerned feels, in multiplied characters, as parent, child, friend,

friend, relation, acquaintance, member of a community, citizen of the world, and, in common with all the inhabitants of the univerſe, the creature of that God who is good unto all.—I am afraid I have tired your patience.——

CLERGYMAN.

Indeed you have not.

PHILOSOPHER.

But I have my own; and I muſt have done.

WHIG.

I ſhould be glad, you would anſwer me one queſtion. Have not ſome of the diſſenters endeavored to introduce a liturgy into their meetings?

PHILOSOPHER.

I am told they have; and have ſhared, in ſome meaſure, the general fate of adventurers, from a ſpecies of diſcipline which that party exerciſe upon ſtragglers out of it, though upon errands ever ſo beneficial and good. A few years ago an Arian was an object of deteſtation among them; they perſecuted

ſecuted and diſtreſſed him in every way they could; now a great part of them are become Arians themſelves. It is not therefore unreaſonable to ſuppoſe, conſidering the general approbation ſhewn by their miniſters, to the Candid Diſquiſitions, and the deſire many of them expreſſed to ſee forms in uſe among their people, that in the late attempts, they withdrew their countenance on principles of policy; that they encouraged or connived at the abuſe thrown on the ſcheme from a regard to what they call the diſſenting intereſt: and that in time they will follow the examples of the perſons they have diſtreſſed.—This would be a very deſireable event. Next to the improvement of the church ſervice, is that of the diſſenting ſervice, in point of importance; and a great improvement would be introducing liturgies; and animating their worſhip with good muſic. In this way, they would increaſe their favorite intereſt; their poor congregations might worſhip with great edification, without the aſſiſtance of a miniſter: they would give

a ſpecimen to the church; put it in mind of a reformation; and lead to a general, voluntary and deſireable uniformity.—What a ſhame it is, that religious men are ſhy of each other, and cannot avoid quarrelling while they pretend to be ſerving Almighty God!—The eſtabliſhment has loſt its influence, and is ridiculous becauſe its ſervices have been neglected. The diſſenters are dwindling for the ſame reaſon. The leaders of parties are unwilling to approach and to make conceſſions to each other. How deſireable would it be to ſee men throw off theſe failings and faults which prevent their doing a moſt important public ſervice? Hardly any thing would be of greater benefit to the country than a pious and rational liturgy. It would induce almoſt all the people to attend the church. If their diſpoſitions and hearts were not as they ſhould be, it would render them ſo, by giving the beſt principles the faireſt chance of gaining upon them. If their diſpoſitions became right, and their hearts good, by continuing to join

in a duty ſo natural and pleaſing, they would make an inexpreſſible addition to their happineſs; they would gratify the fineſt feelings of the human heart; their minds would be filled with the moſt amiable ideas of the Deity; their benevolence, chriſtian charity, public ſpirit, love of their country; their domeſtic virtues; their friendſhip; their good manners: in ſhort, all their good qualities would be improved; they would make themſelves, their families, their country great, proſperous, and happy: and they would anſwer the end of their religion by cultivating that temper and thoſe virtues which are the beſt preparation for another world.

FINIS.

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